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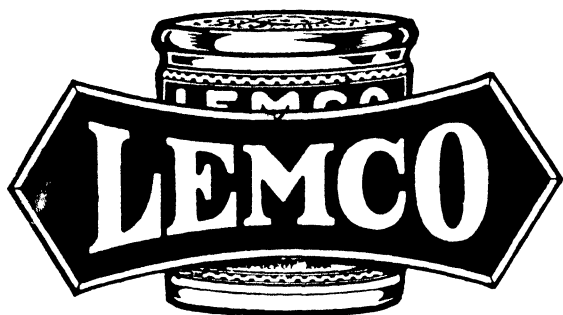
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THE KEY OF LIFE

By

A. A. METHLEY

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AUTHOR OF

'THE IDENTITY OF JANE' AND 'LA BELLE DAME'

COLONIAL EDITION

(For Circulation in the British Colonies and India only.)

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN

ADELPHI TERRACE

MCMIX

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“The night hath a thousand eyes, and the day but one :
Yet the light of the whole world dies with the dying sun.”

“The mind hath a thousand eyes, and the heart but one :
Yet the light of a whole life dies, when love is done.”

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CHAPTER I

THERE was a sakkieh on the edge of the steep Nile bank. It stood under the shade of a wide-spreading thorn tree, and, close at hand, behind a mud wall, was a group of date palms. Their rough, brown stems and plumed heads were silhouetted clearly against the sunset glow of the sky.

A couple of lean, grey buffaloes, with their eyes blindfolded, paced round and round, moving the heavy wheel, and a native boy in a dingy white turban was guiding them. The warm air seemed to be full of the rhythmic murmur of the creaking sakkieh, the gurgle of water, and the quaint, crooning chant of the drowsy Arab.

Along the raised pathway, which borders the river, herds of sheep and goats were being driven, and women, with water-pots on their heads, came slowly through the fields. Filmy wreaths of blue smoke from the fires, which had been newly lit in the neighbouring villages, drifted across the land and gave a touch of delicate softness and mystery to the scene.

It was a typical picture of Eastern life, and one that was none the less beautiful and interesting because it had been repeated, evening by evening,

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with but few variations, through hundreds and thousands of peaceful, monotonous years, ever since the days of the Pharaohs, in fact, when the lotus and the papyrus bloomed in Egypt, and the clever artists of the old world made dainty carvings of just such sheep and oxen, and of men reaping and ploughing and drawing water, on the walls of the tombs and temples of Thebes.

On this particular evening, although the only boat to be seen was a white-winged feluka, and the little town of Luxor was completely hidden behind a bend of the river, there was, nevertheless, one decidedly modern and discordant note to disturb the harmony of the scene, and this was struck by a group on the bank, which consisted of two young Englishmen and a smart black-and-white fox-terrier.

The three were sitting together on the wall beneath the palm trees, and one of the men was working hurriedly at a small sketch of the water-wheel and the brilliant sunset sky. It was evident that he found the task a difficult one, for he frowned impatiently more than once, muttered complaints beneath his breath, and at last shut up his book and flung both it and his sheaf of paint-brushes down on to the dusty ground at his feet. The other man looked up quickly.

"Hullo," he said, "what's happened, Feilden? You don't mean to say that you have finished already? I thought you told me that it would be another half-hour, at least, before the masterpiece could be done."

Feilden took a cigar-case out of his pocket and lit a match.

"It probably never will be done," he answered. "I have a great mind to chuck the thing altogether."

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Look at the beastly sky. It was yellow a minute ago, now it's pink, and before there is time to get some rose madder squeezed out it will have turned green. That idiot of a boy, too, he's never in the same position for three seconds together. You don't happen to know any Arabic, do you, Kerr? If you could go for the little beggar in his own rotten language it might make a difference."

Kerr shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't help you much," he said. "*Imshi*, that's about the extent of my Arabic, and half a dozen swear words, of sorts. I can fire them off at him, if you like. I rather wish that I did know something of the lingo. It would be interesting to understand what the natives are saying to each other. If I had been staying out here for any length of time I should have had a shot at learning it."

"I wish to goodness you knew it now," the other retorted. "These Arabs are perfect fools, and a beastly dragoman hanging round me is more than I can stand. Dirty, insolent brutes. I hate the whole lot of them. Egypt wouldn't be half a bad place if it wasn't for the niggers, but, as it is, I shall be jolly glad to get away from it and back to Europe."

Kerr glanced up at the speaker with an amused twinkle in his eyes. This was not the first time, by any means, that he had heard Feilden mention his antipathy to the natives, and he had been not a little entertained, on more than one occasion, with the young man's tirades and vehement arguments in defence of his opinions.

"At it again," he remarked lazily. "My dear fellow, draw it mild, please. What on earth can you see to dislike so much in the poor beggars? I'm sure they are a harmless lot enough, and not nearly so

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offensive as our hooligans at home. Think of Margate beach, or Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday. You must have been a negro slave-driver, I should think, or a lyncher, in some previous state."

Feilden burst out into a peal of laughter. "That's not a bad idea by any means," he said. "And you think it would explain matters, do you? Well, Kerr, all I can say is this, that it's a jolly good job I'm not in your shoes and starting for India this evening. Four or five years in the East would about do for me altogether. It really is a queer thing, when you come to think of it, but I've simply detested these Arabs, ever since the first boat-load of them came alongside the steamer at Port Said. They may be harmless enough, as you say, but I loathe them, and the mere sight of their ugly black faces makes me feel positively sick."

He ended this speech with a very real shudder of disgust, and it was now Kerr's turn to laugh. "By Jove, Feilden," he said, "you are an insular beggar, and no mistake. A regular John Bull, and my advice is that you go straight back to England and stay there. Foreign travel is evidently not in your line at all. Well, I must be off, I suppose. It won't do for me to miss this evening's train, if I am to catch my boat at Ismalia to-morrow."

He got up as he spoke, and glanced at his watch, in the gathering twilight. Feilden rose at the same time and began to collect his book, paints and scattered brushes.

"I shall stay on a bit longer," he said, "and finish this picture of mine. It is not worth much, certainly, and never will be, but Betty will like it, and I mean to have it framed for her when I get home. I wish you could see Betty, Kerr, she is a pretty girl, and no mistake. I showed you her miniature, didn't I?

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But of course it does not half do her justice. And then she is clever too, and accomplished. You just ought to hear her sing. It's my opinion that she would have been a first-class professional, if she had cared to go in for that sort of thing."

The young man grew more and more eager as he went on, but Captain Kerr did not pay much attention to his friend's enthusiasm. He already knew all about Feilden's lovely young *fiancée*, Elizabeth Cathcart, who was only seventeen, and who had—according to her future husband—the face of a Helen of Troy, the disposition of an angel, and the voice of a *prima donna*. He had, moreover, listened patiently, more than once, to the whole history of the romantic courtship and brief engagement, and knew how Colonel Cathcart had decreed that his daughter should not be married until after her eighteenth birthday, and had advised the bridegroom-elect to travel and see a little of the world in the meantime.

Jack Feilden was a good-natured, sociable young fellow, and inclined to be exceedingly talkative and confidential. He had only known Kerr for a couple of days or so, but, during that time, he had conversed freely about himself and his past life, present circumstances and future prospects. He had given his new friend particulars of his relations and his income, of the fine old house in Kent, which would one day be his, of the surrounding estates and the shooting which the covers afforded, and he had also indulged in endless rhapsodies on the ever-fruitful subject of his betrothed, and of her manifold charms, beauties and accomplishments.

Kerr was beginning to get decidedly bored with his loquacious companion, and with his descriptions of

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blue eyes, golden hair and a rose-leaf complexion, and now, on this last afternoon of his stay at Luxor, when Feilden showed unmistakable signs of an intention to embark once more on the well-worn topic, he was not sorry that his approaching departure furnished him with an excuse for escape.

The two young men were not unlike each other in appearance, as they stood side by side in the shade of the palm trees, for they were both tall, broad-shouldered and sunburnt, and they both wore tweed clothes of much the same shade and cut.

It would not have been difficult to mistake them for one another in the dusky, uncertain light, but, when they were seen more distinctly, the resemblance proved to be merely a superficial one.

Bertram Kerr, to begin with, was a couple of years Feilden's senior, and he looked considerably older than his age. He was slightly the taller, too, and the quiet, stern expression which was habitual to his face contrasted strangely with the younger man's cheerful demeanour, ready smile and air of supreme satisfaction both with himself and with his circumstances.

Most people would have undoubtedly considered Feilden to be by far the better-looking of the two men, and, indeed, it could not be denied that he was a handsome young fellow enough, for his features were regular, his skin clear and ruddy, and his closely-cropped hair so light in colour as to be almost golden.

It was this fair hair, perhaps, which made him look so singularly boyish for his twenty-five years, and it was not easy to realise that he was only two years younger than the grave, determined-looking soldier, whose most noticeable features were a square jaw, an obstinate chin, and a pair of blue eyes that seemed to

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be curiously light and keen in the setting of his brown, sunburnt face.

Kerr picked up his straw hat from the wall on which he had been sitting and lit his pipe.

"Well, I must be off," he said again. "You will be back, I suppose, Feilden, before I leave the hotel, but, if not, we shall meet in London some time or another. I don't expect to stay out in India for five years at a stretch. You will be an old married man when I see you again. Good-bye, and good luck."

The two men shook hands, and Kerr turned away in the direction of Luxor, but, before he had gone many yards, Feilden called him back.

"Look here," he said, "I wish you would take Bob with you. It will be dark when I leave, and there will be no end of those beastly pariahs about. I hate having the dog with me, when I have my painting kit to carry and can't look after him."

Kerr whistled, and the terrier, after one doubtful glance in the direction of his master, followed him. Bob was a sensible little fellow, and he was not particularly fond of sitting on guard beside a paint-box and camp-stool. He greatly preferred a brisk walk along the river bank, for the muddy slopes abounded in large, active rats, while an occasional sharp encounter with a pariah dog furnished a pleasant spice of danger and excitement.

Kerr sauntered along quietly. Although he had made the lateness of the hour an excuse for leaving Feilden, he had, in reality, plenty of time to spare, and, as the evening was a more than usually beautiful one, he was in no hurry.

The strange, mysterious chill which immediately follows sundown in the East had already passed away, and the sky was crimson with the afterglow. It

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transformed everything with its magic radiance and turned the pallid silver of the river surface into stretches of flaming rose and scarlet.

There were numbers of Arabs coming along the pathway as Kerr, with Bob at his heels, strolled slowly in the direction of Karnak and Luxor; for there is a village near the ruins of the great temple, and, at this hour, the peasants were returning to their homes after the long day's work in the fields and irrigation trenches.

There were dignified, grey-bearded men, walking or riding on small, rough-coated donkeys, slender, shuffling women, who pulled wisps of black veils across their faces as the Englishman passed, and troops of children of all ages and sizes, who stopped to stare up at him with outstretched hands and shy murmurs of "*Baksheesh*."

Kerr was new to the country, and he was, moreover, fond of children, so he paused now and again to smile kindly down into the dark, liquid eyes, and to drop small coins into the tiny palms.

He did not in any way share in Feilden's repulsion and dislike, but, on the contrary, was attracted by the Arabs, as he was by everything in this strange, fascinating land.

"It's a splendid country," he said to himself, as he paused to watch a long line of water-carrying women pass in front of him on their way up from the river. "A splendid country, a splendid climate, and a fine-looking lot of natives, too, on the whole. I can't see why that fellow Feilden hates them so much. They seem to me to be a decent set of people. Well, I must say that it's a jolly good thing for Feilden that he can please himself and clear out of Egypt as soon as he likes."

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The little procession took some time to pass, for there were more than twenty women and girls, some of the latter being mere children. Kerr watched them with no little interest and admiration as they made their way, with swift, sure-footed ease, up the almost perpendicular track that led from the brink of the river to the pathway above. Each woman carried a heavy water-pot, and the steep ascent was both rough and slippery, but the climbing feet never faltered and the erect, veiled heads balanced their loads with marvellous security and grace.

They looked as if they had stepped straight out of some old picture as they came, one by one, up the narrow path, with their dark eyes, thin trailing draperies and wet, bare feet. They were like so many Rachels or Rebeccas returning from the well, and performing the daily household drudgery of the East with the simple dignity and skill which had been handed down to them by generations of just such blue-robed, black-veiled women.

Kerr was standing a little back from the path, leaning against the twisted trunk of a thorn tree. Under the shadow of the branches he was nearly invisible in the quickly-gathering twilight, but the eyes of the Arab women were bright and keen behind their hastily-drawn, dusty veils, and more than one eager, interested glance was thrown in the direction of the young Englishman. The fox-terrier was sitting at his feet, and its small body made a white patch in the dim shadow.

"Come on, Bob, that must be the lot of them, I should think," Kerr said, at last touching the dog with his foot, when about a score of the women had passed and the way was clear again. He stepped out from the arched shelter of the tree, but, at this moment,

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another figure appeared over the edge of the bank. He beat a hasty retreat, and waited patiently as two more women and a little, saffron-robed girl came into view, their veiled heads and gracefully-balanced water-jars standing out, in sharp relief, against the brilliant background of the crimson sky.

Bob, however, felt, by this time, that he had been kept waiting long enough, and he had no intention of submitting to any further delay. He darted forward impetuously, emerging with startling suddenness from the shadows, brushed past the foremost woman, and then, bounding along with friendly boisterousness, flung himself, with all his might, against the slender figure of the child in her rear.

In a second everything was in a tumult of noise and confusion. The little girl was almost thrown down by the dog's unexpected onslaught, and she gave a wild, piercing scream of sheer terror. Then, losing her balance, she swayed to one side, and the heavy jar, slipping from her small, trembling hands, was dashed to pieces on the ground at her feet.

Almost instantly a number of other children, round-eyed and inquisitive, seemed to spring from nowhere, and they crowded about the scene of the catastrophe, peering out of the gathering twilight, and pushing each other roughly aside in their anxiety to see what had happened. Some of the women, too, on hearing the girl's cries, hurried back, and Bob, barking loudly, darted hither and thither. He was enjoying himself immensely, and he added, in no small degree, to the general excitement and consternation.

"Come to heel, Bob! You little fiend, be quiet, can't you?" Kerr called to the dog angrily, and, at the same time, he came forward into the centre of

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the group, intent on repairing, as best he might, the damage which had been done.

The child, after one horrified glance at the shattered jar, had flung herself down on her face in the dust, beside the spilt water and fragments of broken pottery, and was now weeping bitterly, and beating the ground with clenched, despairing hands. She looked so absolutely miserable and so babyish as she lay there, that Kerr, who, in spite of his stern face, was as soft-hearted as possible where children were concerned, felt himself touched to the quick.

He stooped down, and, lifting her in his arms, set her on her slender, bare feet again, and began, with awkward gentleness, to brush the mud and dust from her trailing yellow garment and skimpy black veil.

She was a tiny slip of a thing, not more than eleven years old at the most, and she looked much younger, a veritable baby, in fact, as she stood there, sobbing piteously, with her soft mouth quivering and the tears streaming down her smooth, brown cheeks.

But, in spite of the child's woebegone aspect and heart-broken wailings it was, in the Englishman's opinion, a simple matter enough, when all was said and done.

A shattered jar—worth a few pence at the most—spilt water and a crying, frightened baby.

Kerr acted exactly as he would have done if the accident had taken place in the little Devonshire village where he had been born, instead of out here in the mysterious, inscrutable East, and he never paused for a moment to remember that in other countries other manners prevail, and that he was no longer in England, but in Egypt, and among a people whose customs and habits of thought might be entirely new and unfamiliar.

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Such an accident, or others very like it in character, had often taken place at home, only then it had been usually the beer for dinner or a jug of milk that had been sacrificed, instead of mere worthless water, and it never occurred to the young man that the comfort to be offered and the remedy to be applied must not, in this case, be exactly the same as those which had so often proved effectual on former and very similar occasions.

He hated a fuss or a disturbance of any kind, and the women were crowding round him now and chattering loudly. Some men were approaching along the path, and the troops of children seemed to be collecting from all points of the compass. As they thronged together and pressed unpleasantly close to him, Kerr made up his mind to bring the incident to a conclusion without further delay.

"Come now, my dear child, there's no use in crying over spilt milk, or spilt water either, for the matter of that, and there's not so very much harm done, after all." He spoke kindly, with his hand still resting on the slim, shaking shoulder, and quite forgetting, for the moment, that his well-meant efforts at consolation were alike unintelligible both to the child herself and to the eagerly-listening crowd of bystanders. Then he wiped the tear-stained face with his handkerchief, and, bending down, kissed the soft cheek and pressed the first coin he had found in his pocket, which happened to be an English florin, into the trembling hand.

"There, little one," he added, "that will put everything right, unless I'm very much mistaken, and will leave something over besides for you to buy lolly-pops with. Come, cheer up, kiddie, and run away home to your mother."

He stood up, preparatory to continuing his walk,

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for it was really getting late now, and a smile curved his lips as he remembered that he had been speaking English, and that none of his words of comfort and condolence could have been understood.

The little girl was staring up at him wonderingly. He patted her veiled head, once more advised her to cheer up, and then turned to confront the crowd of Arabs that surrounded him.

There was a pause, a moment's silence, as it were of dumb, breathless astonishment, and then Kerr felt his arm gripped by a lean, clutching hand, and he was wheeled suddenly round to meet the angry glare of a pair of fierce, bloodshot eyes.

The whole scene seemed to have changed in an instant and to have altered its character completely.

A number of men, shouting and gesticulating, pushed and hustled their way through the throng. Some of the women screamed, and sticks were raised threateningly. The hot air was full of the sound of harsh, clamouring voices, the dust in the pathway was thrown up in stifling clouds by shuffling feet, and the murky darkness seemed to be alive with the white gleam of teeth and the flash of angry eyes.

Night had fallen, and the calm and peaceful beauty of the evening had disappeared as if by magic. The red glow, which still lingered in the western sky, seemed to be ominous now, and suggestive of menace and danger. As his assailant swung him round furiously, away from the child by whom he had been standing, Kerr felt, for the moment, completely bewildered and overpowered.

What could be the meaning of it all? What had happened to occasion this storm of anger and to arouse this sudden fury of antagonism and hatred?

He wrenched himself free with an effort from the

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thin, powerful arms that were gripping him so frantically, and, as he did so, he was conscious of a dark, convulsed face, with a great scar seaming it from forehead to chin, and of a pair of wild, red-rimmed eyes flaming at him out of the darkness. Then, as the man flung himself forward again, he thrust him on one side and stood upright, in the centre of the pushing, clamouring throng, with his fists clenched and his face pale with anger.

"Get away, you brutes. *Imshi*, leave me alone, I say," he cried, as the circle of glowering faces came nearer again, and his former assailant gathered himself together for a fresh onslaught.

But before there was time for the attack to be made an interruption came, the ring of hoofs resounded on the hard pathway, and three or four donkey-boys, riding their animals bare-backed, appeared on the scene.

There were a few more moments of wild confusion and excitement, and then, to Kerr's amazement, the uproar died away as rapidly as it had arisen.

It was dark enough for the natives to be uncertain as to the number and nationality of the newcomers, and the crowd scattered to right and left as the donkeys galloped up, and then swiftly dispersed and vanished into the gloom.

The clamour of guttural voices ceased, the choking clouds of dust cleared away, and Kerr was left, standing bare-headed on the pathway, with the newly-arrived donkey-boys as his only companions.

One of these boys had dismounted, and he came forward with the Englishman's hat, which had been knocked off in the fray, in his hand.

Kerr took it from him and began to brush the thick dust from his clothes.

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“What on earth was it all about?” he exclaimed angrily, and the boy, who could speak a little English, launched out at once into a voluble if somewhat incoherent stream of explanations and apologies.

He had, it appeared, gathered a little of the meaning of the affair from the retreating Arabs, and he was eager in his protestations that no harm had been intended, and that the people were merely ignorant and foolish.

“Nothing, master, no nothing. That man, he very bad man, he *magnoon*, what you say mad, and angry, he angry about woman. All right now, master, they poor people, not know better. Master come back to the hotel.”

But Kerr was not to be satisfied so easily.

“Angry? What had he got to be angry about?” he asked. “Because I broke that two-penny half-penny water-pot, or the dog did, it’s all the same thing. And the child wasn’t hurt in the least.”

“Child! No, master, that woman man’s wife. He bad man, and angry because master speak to wife.”

“Wife! Nonsense.” Kerr burst into a peal of laughter as he spoke. “Wife, indeed. Those idiots have been stuffing you up. Grand-daughter would be more like it. Come on now, Bob, you have done enough mischief for one day. I have a good mind to send in a little bill to your owner for two shillings and the price of a new hat.”

He made another attempt to restore his battered headgear to its original shape, and then, followed closely by Bob and the donkey-boy, set off, once more, at a brisk pace, in the direction of Luxor.

The adventure on the river bank had delayed him considerably, and it was late when he reached the

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town; so late, indeed, that he had barely time to collect his baggage, pay his bill, and finish the necessary preparations for his journey north.

It was near the end of the tourist season in Upper Egypt and the hotel was almost empty. Kerr did not meet anyone that he knew as he hurried out of the building, and the incident of the broken water-jar remained unmentioned.

In his ignorance of the natives and their customs it never occurred to the young man that the sudden attack made upon him had been anything particularly out of the common. He travelled down to Cairo, and on to join his regiment in India, and before long, in the novelty and excitement of his new life, the whole affair was, so far as he himself was concerned, at least, almost entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER II

JACK FEILDEN returned to the hotel soon after Kerr had left for the railway station, and it struck him, as he entered the building, that everything looked indescribably cheerless and desolate.

A fortnight or three weeks ago the place had been pleasant enough, for then the hotel had been crowded to overflowing, and there had been plenty of tennis, dances and amusements of all sorts.

Now, however, it was all very different. The tourists had been frightened away by the hot weather, and a couple of sleepy Arab servants seemed to be the only occupants of the wide verandah and gaily-decorated hall. Feilden yawned more than once as he loitered through the deserted rooms, and he made up his mind that Luxor was getting unbearable, and that he would leave for Cairo himself on the following day.

Later on in the evening, when he had finished his solitary dinner and had made arrangements for his departure, he came out of the hotel and, with Bob at his heels, strolled down the palm-shaded pathway, and out of the garden into the village street beyond.

He had found, on unpacking his paint-box, that one of his favourite brushes was missing—dropped, probably in the dust, by the mud wall where he had made his sketch—and, as he had nothing to do, he determined that the little piece of lost

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property should serve as a pretext for an evening walk.

At the gate of the garden he paused for a moment, for here, no less than in the hotel itself, the contrast between the present and the past was a very marked one.

This gate and the space of open road immediately outside it, was, during the season, a rendezvous for all the dragomans and donkey-boys of the town. Even at night-time there would generally be a chattering crowd of Arabs and tourists, but this evening the place presented a very different aspect, and seemed to be curiously quiet and deserted.

A few natives were there, asleep in the cool starlight, as if awaiting the arrival of some belated excursionist. Some of them were seated on the ground, with their heads bent forward on to their knees and their backs against the white-washed wall that faces the entrance to the hotel. Others, shrouded in their long robes, and looking almost like corpses, lay prostrate in the thick, warm dust on the edge of the road.

The air was breathlessly still, and, except for the rustle of a garment, as one of the sleepers shifted his position, and the mournful chorus of the watch-dogs in distant parts of the town, there was scarcely a sound to be heard.

Feilden passed through the gateway, and, as he did so, one of the muffled figures moved slightly, and peered up at him from beneath a thick cloak of some dark woollen material. A few moments later this man rose to his feet, and, drawing his dingy covering more completely over his head, followed down the deserted street. The soft dust deadened the sound of his footsteps as he walked.

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It was very beautiful out on the wide road beside the river on that clear March evening. Jack stopped for a little while when he reached the Nile bank, and behind him, in the shadows, a stealthy, cowering figure halted in its turn. The dim eyes of the Arab were fixed with a strange, frantic eagerness on the young Englishman, and it was evident that he noticed nothing of the mysterious loveliness of the scene, which the other had paused to admire.

On the one hand were the courts and clustered columns of Luxor temple, with the soft light of the rising moon shining on its ancient grey stones, where the incised hieroglyphics could still be faintly traced. The moonlight shone, too, on the white-washed mud houses of the native town in the background, on the quaint, pylon-shaped pigeon cotes, and on the slender minaret of the old mosque.

On the other side of the Nile, away to the west, were the misty plains and hills and valleys of Thebes.

Feilden stood motionless for several minutes, watching the silvery radiance broaden and intensify, but, although he appreciated the beauty of the picture, it had little charm for him this evening, and he felt no regret in the thought that he was probably looking at it all for the last time. He was by nature fond of society and amusement, and the unaccustomed solitude had affected his spirits and made him depressed and homesick. In his present mood he cared nothing for the glow and colour of Egypt, the cloudless skies, the sunshine and the wide desert spaces; and they all seemed far less attractive and desirable than the green woods and fields of his native land.

“After all, there’s no place like good old England,”

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he murmured to himself. "England, and home, and Betty—bless her dear little heart! And jolly glad I shall be to see them all again."

He whistled to the fox-terrier, but the dog had run back a short way, and was sniffing suspiciously at the bare feet of an Arab who was loitering in the shadow of a wall. The whistle had to be repeated several times before Bob showed any signs of obeying the summons.

"Come here, you little brute. What are you doing? Come to heel."

Jack called loudly, and, when at last the small white figure of the dog appeared, hurrying towards him out of the gloom, he did not delay any longer, but turned his face northward, and started off at a brisk pace, past the great temple, with its rubbish heaps and tall stone statues, through the town, and out into the open country beyond.

Feilden had been in Luxor for some weeks, and being an active man and accustomed to plenty of exercise, he had done a good deal of walking along the narrow paths and causeways, and through the primitive native villages in the neighbourhood.

He had plenty of time this evening, for he had left the hotel almost immediately after dinner, and the full moon would give him light for his return journey.

Feilden walked quickly, with an easy, swinging stride, along the road which leads to Karnak and past the dark gateways of the temple of Khons. Then he turned towards the river again, skirted a village, crossed some fields, and finally emerged upon the Nile bank, near to the place which had been the scene of Kerr's adventure in the afternoon.

At one point in the path his foot struck sharply against the broken fragments of an earthenware

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water-pot, and he kicked them aside carelessly, and walked on. Bob stopped for a minute to investigate the scattered pieces, and, perhaps, to reflect remorsefully upon his misdoings. Then he hurried after his master. Behind, at a little distance, there was another following figure.

The Arab had pushed back the dark covering from his head, and in the slowly-increasing light it could be seen that he was a lean, gaunt man, middle-aged, with strange eyes, that were at the same time dim and fierce, and with an expression of concentrated malice and cunning, that almost amounted to madness, on his wild, eager face.

As he hurried along in the Englishman's wake, he muttered hoarsely to himself, in a low, husky voice, and a listener, with a knowledge of Arabic, might have been able to catch the drift of the whispered words.

"The man with the white dog. It is he. Yes, of a certainty, it is he. My eyes are dim, yet that much can they see plainly. The man with the white dog. Curses on him, I say! Curses on him! Devil and son of a dog that he is!"

As the moon rose higher and higher in the cloudless heavens the dark, convulsed face of the Arab could be seen distinctly.

There was a great scar across it, a scar which ran nearly from brow to chin, and which gave a horrible, sardonic grin to one side of the mouth. The red-rimmed eyes were set closely together, and he stooped and thrust forward his head as he walked.

He was a powerfully-built man, although thin and emaciated, and the twitching muscles stood out like whip-cord on his lean, bony arms and clenched hands.

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The flat, open country was flooded with light now, and everything was transformed and beautified by the clear, mystical radiance. Above the trees rose the huge ruined pylons of Karnak, and the hills on the further side of the river stood out, with strange distinctness, against the pale sky.

There was something unreal and fantastic about the whole scene, so different, in its brilliant incisiveness and sharp contrasts, from the faint, dreamy moonlight of more northern climes. It was like a wide stage, with the palms, the river and the distant hills for a background. The weird shape of the motionless water-wheel, the crumbling mud wall and the twisted thorn tree formed the theatrical properties, while the Englishman, the white fox-terrier and the dark-robed, following Arab were the actors in the carefully-prepared and exquisitely-lighted *mise en scène*.

The situation itself, the position of those three figures on the stage of that moonlit landscape, was certainly full of dramatic and even of tragical possibilities. There was something that was almost terrible in the contrast between the absolute unconsciousness of Feilden, as he strolled along with the dog at his heels, and the demeanour of the stealthy, crouching figure in his wake. As the Arab glided noiselessly through the thick dust his keen, wrinkled face quivered with suppressed excitement, and there was a glare of ferocity and hatred in his bloodshot eyes.

Never once, since he left the town, had Feilden stopped in his walk to glance behind him, and even if he had done so, and had noticed the native in his rear, the idea that he was being followed with any malevolent intent would never have entered his head.

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An Arab behind on the pathway. Very likely. Why not? There were always niggers of some sort about in this confounded country. A good many more of them than were wanted, for the matter of that. These, or something very like them, would have been the young man's reflections, if he had chanced to glance over his shoulder and had caught sight of the furtive, shrouded figure.

They were by this time getting very close to the place where Jack had made his sketch in the afternoon, and now, as the shelter of the little palm grove was reached, the Arab hurried softly forward, and, in the dusky gloom, drew nearer and nearer to his quarry. As he moved along he slipped a knife from the folds at his waist, and the thin, cruel lips curled into a still more evil grin than before, as he drew his finger down its keen edge. He pressed forward, stealing like a spectre from shadow to shadow, and darting swiftly across the open spaces.

His head craned forward from between the heavy folds of his cloak and the moonlight flashed fitfully on his white teeth and savage, glittering eyes.

Feilden paused when at last he reached the further side of the sakkieh, and stood, leaning against the broken wall, and looking out admiringly at the wonderful picture of shining river stretches and wide, shimmering plain, which was spread out before his eyes.

"My word, but it is jolly here to-night," he murmured half aloud, and then he took his cigar-case from his pocket, struck a match, and watched the tiny flame as it burnt steadily in the soft, windless air.

"May he be cursed for ever. He and all his house. May he die in torment!" The Arab muttered the

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relentless words under his breath, and then he stole silently round the motionless wheel, and across the shallow irrigation trench, creeping, on stealthy bare feet, nearer and nearer to his prey. The white moonlight shone full on the scarred, vindictive face, and gleamed on the sharp point of the knife. As he moved forward the man slipped the thick, upper garment back from his shoulders, and gathered the dark, heavy folds dexterously together into one hand.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a harsh cry uttered in a wild, strained voice, a muffled shout, and the shrill barking of a dog. Feilden, absolutely taken by surprise as he was, had hardly time to be conscious of the swift spring of a lean, savage figure, and the suffocating pressure of stifling, evil-smelling cloth, before he felt a stunning blow on his head and the prick of his assailant's dagger in his side. It seemed to him that he was sinking deeper and ever deeper into horrible, breathless darkness.

Powerful fingers, hard and ruthless, even through the enveloping, woollen folds, were gripping his throat, and a frantic voice was grating on his ears, snarling and ejaculating, in fierce, violent tones, words and phrases which were absolutely incomprehensible to him.

"It is he. It is he. The man with the white dog. Curses on him, curses on him, for ever and ever!"

Before very long it was all over, and there was silence again, silence, and a peace so profound that it seemed impossible to believe that it had ever been disturbed, on the river bank. Away at a little distance, a light flickered fitfully round a solitary native hut, which stood on the outskirts of a field,

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surrounded by the usual huddle of pigeon houses, rubbish heaps and ruinous, squalid sheds. A dog howled mournfully and incessantly, and the wild dismal sound, rising and falling in ghastly cadence, found its echo in the cries of other watch-dogs in the distant villages.

After a time a fire was lit near the hut, and the reek of wood smoke drifted across the field. The ruddy, leaping flames cast strange reflections on to the rough buildings and threw the outline of the pariah, crouching on a broken wall, into strange relief.

A couple of other dogs crawled cautiously through the bushes near the sakkieh and sniffed inquisitively at the trampled dust of the pathway.

Further on down the river, the small, white body of a fox-terrier, its side crushed and blood-stained from a cruel blow, floated northward on the swift, noiseless stream.

Nearer at hand, on the black, damp mud at the edge of the river, Jack Feilden's cap was lying, ready the next morning, when search should be made for the missing Englishman, to bear silent witness as to how he had met his death. A false step on the treacherous, crumbling bank, a fall, and a cry for help, unheard and unheeded in the solitude.

The bank is very steep there, and the river flows dark and deep below it. Anyone would find it an easy matter to realise what had happened, and to picture how the man, stunned, probably, by the fall, had been unable to escape from the smooth, relentless sweep of the current.

After a time the red glow of the fire flickered and died out, the melancholy cries of the dog ceased, and the calm and loveliness of the African night reigned supreme.

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The full moon rose higher and higher in the pale, luminous sky, dimming the pale stars as it ascended, turning the broad surface of the Nile into a sheet of gleaming silver, and flooding the whole countryside with its cool, brilliant light.

CHAPTER III

It was a dull November evening, more than ten years after the news of Jack Feilden's death reached England, and Elizabeth Cathcart was standing at her garden gate, looking out into the dusky shadows of the beech woods. The sun had already set, and there was a streak of wintry crimson in the western sky. The damp pathway was strewn thickly with fallen leaves, and the ruddy festoons of a Virginia creeper made a gorgeous background to the woman's graceful figure and pale, beautiful face.

Ten years. It is a long time certainly, and to Elizabeth the years had passed slowly and drearily enough. She was a very different person to the light-hearted girl whose miniature Feilden had taken with him to Egypt, but she was a beautiful woman still, for although her face had lost its youthful roundness and colour, it had gained immeasurably in character, and there was something strangely attractive in the curve of the sensitive lips, and in the haunting expression of sadness which, even when she smiled, lingered in the deep eyes.

Betty used to think sometimes that she had lost everything, as it were, at one blow, for, when she recovered from the long illness which followed Jack's death, the exquisite soprano voice, of which he had been so proud, was gone for ever. Then her father died, and the old home at the Manor House was broken up. Her brothers married or went abroad,

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and now, for more than eight years, she had been living in the little Dower House in the beech woods, with a faithful old servant as her principal friend and companion.

Old Nurse, as she was always called, was quite an institution in the Cathcart family, for she had had charge of each of its members in turn, and had spoiled and scolded them all to her heart's content.

Betty, the youngest, had been her chief favourite, and, although she had ruled over her with a rod of iron, she had never allowed anyone else to speak a harsh word to the little girl, and she had been the sworn foe of governesses and masters alike.

Nurse had not by any means approved of Elizabeth's engagement to Jack Feilden, and would probably have considered any suitor as quite unworthy of her darling, but when the young man's death occurred her grief and sympathy had been boundless, and she had declared her intention of devoting herself for the rest of her life to Betty's service.

People often wondered that Miss Cathcart did not marry, for she was a wealthy woman, as well as a beautiful one, but she had loved Feilden and mourned his loss with a passion of which, perhaps, few girls of seventeen would have been capable, and during the years that followed his death she remained true to his memory, and buried all her hopes of love and happiness in his grave.

It was a monotonous existence that she led in the lonely Dower House, for although she read a great deal, and acted the part of Lady Bountiful in the village to perfection, her studies and charitable works could not take up all her time. She cared very little for country society and amusements, and there

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were not many congenial neighbours in the dull, gossiping hamlet of Beggar's Bush.

Probably, had she been placed among new friends and new interests, Elizabeth would, to a great extent, at least, have recovered from the terrible shock which she had sustained, but, as it was, circumstances had combined to force her life into a narrow groove, and, although at times she longed for change and novelty, when it came to the point, it always seemed easier to go on from day to day in the old commonplace round, than to make any real effort after fresh interests and a wider outlook.

Nobody cared for her now—that was the trouble that lay at the root of the whole matter—there was not one single person in the wide world who loved her supremely, or to whom her happiness and welfare were of paramount importance.

It had all been different once, but now her father was dead, and Jack was dead too. Her brothers had their wives and their children, their own cares and their own ambitions. Even old Nurse had near relations who, it was to be presumed, held the foremost places in her affections. Only she, Elizabeth Cathcart, was left, alone and unwanted, in a grey, desolate world, with the ghosts of her past joys and her unfulfilled hopes as companions.

Betty became more and more silent and reserved as the time went on, and she found her chief pleasure in long walks in the beech woods, and in brooding over the days of her girlhood and of her engagement.

The past was far more real to her than either the present or the future, and, as she wandered down the familiar pathways and lingered in the bracken-bordered glades, it was easy to fancy that the long, lonely years had been nothing but a miserable dream,

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and that Jack Feilden was once again at her side.

As was perhaps only natural she had grown to idealise the memory of her dead lover, and all the faults and weaknesses of his character were now entirely forgotten. He seemed to her like some wonderful, peerless being in whom all possible graces and virtues were combined together, and the tragedy of his sudden death had only served to increase the glamour of romance with which his personality was surrounded.

As she dreamed over the golden days of her betrothal, it seemed to Betty that she had had a brief glimpse of heaven or of fairyland, and she would try to recall every episode and trivial detail of that happy time.

She found herself singing sometimes, in a soft, husky whisper, snatches of the songs and ballads which Jack had loved, and which she had often sung to him in those far-off days.

The "Skye Boat Song" had been one of his special favourites, and she often awoke from her day-dreams with the quaint, plaintive words on her lips.

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of heart he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye."

Stalwart Jack Feilden had had a touch of the sentimental in his composition, and he had always preferred love songs, or those ditties that treated of sorrow or despair.

There had been another song, too, which Elizabeth had once loved dearly, but that she never sang, although the lines and the melody which accompanied them were often ringing in her brain.

It seemed impossible that she could ever have been fond of the words, for they hurt her now like a touch

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on a raw wound, and emphasised, with an intensity that was well-nigh unbearable, the contrast between the past and the joyless, hopeless present.

“The night hath a thousand eyes and the day but one,
Yet the light of the whole world dies with the dying sun.
The mind hath a thousand eyes and the heart but one,
Yet the light of a whole life dies when love is done.”

Elizabeth would catch her breath involuntarily, and the hot, bitter tears of regret and self-pity would well up into her eyes as she recalled the days of her lost happiness. She could not help feeling that there was something cruel and relentless in the simple lines that struck so exactly the keynote of her own desolate life.

On this particular autumn afternoon Betty's thoughts were even more than usually busy with old times and old friends, for she had just been to see her sister-in-law, Rose Brown, who, with her little daughter Dot, was staying at the Manor House.

Rose had been Elizabeth's dearest friend when they were both girls, and, shortly before the latter's engagement to Jack Feilden, she had married George Cathcart and had gone out with him to India.

All that happened more than ten years ago now, and then there had come the news of Dot's birth, of George's death, and finally of Rose's re-marriage.

Elizabeth had felt hurt and even a little scornful when the latest tidings arrived, for, in the light of her own fidelity to Jack's memory, she could not understand how Rose could forget and be consoled so easily, but her contempt died away as the years passed and she had been delighted to welcome her sister-in-law and niece to England.

However, their stay in the old country was not destined to be of long duration. Dot was a delicate

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child and she had caught a bad chill on the journey home. She had been taken to a specialist, and he had decreed, without hesitation, that it would be fatal for her to stay in England, and that she must be taken to a warmer climate without delay.

Betty had been looking forward eagerly to having Rose with her during the winter months, and the disappointment was a very bitter one. There was an added touch of sadness in the sweet face as she stood at the gate in the gathering twilight, and she glanced round wistfully at the autumn-hued garden where, now that the sun had set, everything looked indescribably forlorn and desolate.

The crimson and yellow dahlias hung heavy-headed from their supporting sticks, there was a thicket of chrysanthemums in one corner, and a delicate mauve haze of Michaelmas daisies showed in front of the house. Beyond the garden the smooth boles of the beech trees stood out pale and ghostly in the dim light, and the brown, withered leaves drifted in through the wooden railings and lay in brown heaps on the flower-beds and narrow paths.

How unchanged it all was, how familiar. The ten long years which had devastated her life had made but little difference to the beech trees and the flowers, to the whirling autumn leaves and the grey November sky.

"The light of the whole world dies with the dying sun."

Elizabeth shivered, and turned away from the dreary scene with a sigh, and then the door of the house was flung open, a ruddy glow of firelight streamed out on to the sodden pathway, and a small, neat figure in demure black and white appeared upon the threshold.

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“Why, Miss Betty, is that you?” Nurse called, in the shrill voice which had not lost its Cockney accent, although more than thirty years had passed since she left her native city. “What are you doing of, my dear, out in that there damp garden? It’s enough to make you catch your death of cold, that it is. Come on in this minute, miss. There’s a nice fire in the drawing-room, and cook ’as made some of them little ’ot cakes for your tea.”

Nurse was lighting the lamps and drawing the curtains in the old-fashioned hall when Elizabeth entered the house, and everything looked very bright and cheerful after the gloom and chill of the garden. A fire was burning on the open hearth, and a fox-terrier was asleep on the rug. There was a large bowl of russet-coloured chrysanthemums on a table near the window.

A letter with a foreign stamp was lying near the flowers, and as Betty picked it up, she noticed that it was from Egypt, and wondered whether it was from a woman she knew, who lived in Alexandria, and who often wrote to her and sent her numberless commissions to execute.

She did not anticipate that the letter would be either important or interesting, so she went on into the drawing-room and settled herself comfortably by the fire before she tore open the envelope and glanced casually at the closely-written sheets.

It seemed to her at first sight that the writing was different from her friend’s ordinary hand. She bent forward, and held the paper near to the lamp in order to be able to see more clearly.

There was a second envelope enclosed, and, as she moved, it slipped from the folds of the letter and fell to the ground at her feet.

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"A list of things that Marjory wants, I suppose," Betty murmured to herself as she stooped to pick it up, and then something caught her eyes and her face suddenly became stiff and deadly pale.

For more than a minute she stared fixedly at the letter in her hand, as if she had been transformed into an image of stone. Her eyes were wide and awe-struck, and her underlip was caught in between her teeth.

On the envelope was the one word "Betty," and it was written in a handwriting that she knew well.

Elizabeth was a highly-strung and imaginative woman, and the meeting with her old friend Rose had brought the days of her girlhood vividly to her mind. It was small wonder if, as she looked down at the letter addressed to her in the well-remembered writing of her dead lover, it should seem to her that strange, mysterious powers were at work, and that she had actually received a message from another world.

"Betty." Yes, that was the one word on the envelope, and the writing was most certainly that of Jack himself. There could be no doubt about it. The form of the letters was unmistakable, although they were crookedly and shakily written. It was like the ghost of his old, clear handwriting, or, perhaps, it was like a letter that a ghost had penned.

She tore open the envelope and, with trembling fingers, drew out the sheet of thin, foreign paper that it contained. At first it seemed to her that it was merely a blank sheet of paper, and the expression of dazed bewilderment deepened in her eyes, but, as she smoothed it out, she saw that there were two lines of writing scrawled upon it in the same strange

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writing. Two lines, six words, that was all, and they were these:

“MY DARLING BETTY,—

“Yours ever, JACK.”

As her eyes rested on the words—surely the shortest love-letter that has ever been written—the paper slipped from her nerveless fingers and she felt suddenly faint and giddy.

“My darling Betty. Yours ever, Jack.”

What could it mean? Had time moved backwards? Was she, once again, the Betty Cathcart of the past? How often had she not seen those very same words at the beginning and end of each eagerly-awaited missive?

“My darling Betty. Yours ever, Jack.”

The reader shivered, and glanced round her at the dimly-lit corners of the room. It would hardly have surprised her then to see faces, the faces of those who had died long ago, peering at her from out of the gloom, or to hear the old voices ringing through the silence.

How could anything seem strange or impossible when she held in her hands a letter in the actual writing of Jack Feilden, her dead lover, who had been drowned at Luxor ten years ago?

Elizabeth recovered herself with an effort, pushed back the loose hair from her forehead, and then, picking up the other loose sheets of paper, set to work to peruse them carefully.

Her heart was still beating with an almost suffocating speed, and her hands had not ceased to tremble, but, outwardly, she was herself again, quiet, serious and self-possessed.

There were two letters in the original envelope, she

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now discovered, besides the strange enclosure, and both were written in a small, neat and quite unfamiliar handwriting.

The first began with the words, "Dear Madam," and the formal address served to bring her back effectually to the ordinary, everyday world of solid fact and reality.

"Dear Madam." No letter from a spirit-realm of dream and fancy would, surely, begin in that commonplace fashion, and yet, as her eyes travelled down the page, what a marvellous, what a well-nigh unbelievable story it was that unfolded itself.

More than once, as she read, she paused to glance round the familiar room, in order to assure herself that she was really Elizabeth Cathcart, and that this wonderful thing was real, solid fact, and not the wild tangle of some impossible dream.

Jack Feilden was alive. That was the one overwhelming truth that, at last, forced its way into her stunned and bewildered mind. He was alive, not dead, and had, it was believed, been living as a captive among the Arabs for the past ten years.

The writer was a doctor who had chanced to be at Luxor—it was from there that the letter was sent—at the time of Feilden's reappearance, and he had, it was evident, taken Jack into his own charge until it was possible for him to be restored to his friends and relations.

"It is three weeks ago now"—so the letter ran—"since Mr Feilden was found. I came across him wandering in the fields one evening after dark. He had fallen down, as if exhausted, by the side of the path, and I thought, at first, that he was a native. However, when I went to his assistance, he spoke to

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me in English. I managed to get him back to the town with some difficulty, for he seemed to be stunned and only half conscious. He could not tell us his name, or anything that had happened to him, and he was terribly weak and emaciated. Indeed, up till a few days ago, he has been so ill that we hardly hoped he would pull through. During the last week he has revived to a wonderful extent, and it is now quite certain that he is the Mr Feilden who was supposed to have been drowned in the Nile ten years ago.

“What has happened to him since then, and where he has been, it is, at present, impossible to say. He either cannot, or will not, speak of his experiences. In my opinion he has, to a great extent, lost his memory, although he remembers perfectly everything that occurred up to the time of his disappearance. It is, I am sorry to say, quite evident that he was very badly treated during his captivity, and his health is seriously impaired. He is blind, his eyes having been put out many years ago, and he is feeble and exhausted after the hardships which he has undergone. However, his spirits are good, and I have hopes that he will, ultimately, regain his strength.

“I need hardly tell you that he will receive every possible care and attention, and I trust, in my next letter, to be able to report that he is making good progress.

“Mr Feilden’s re-appearance has naturally created a great sensation in this place, but we are trying to keep the affair as quiet as possible. Any publicity or excitement would be most dangerous to the patient in his present condition.

“There are many theories as to the meaning of this extraordinary occurrence. Some people believe that

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Mr Feilden walked for some distance into the country, on the night of his disappearance, and was taken by wandering Arabs, who may have had some idea of holding him to ransom, and others think that he was carried away for a time to the Soudan. We cannot, as yet, question Mr Feilden. Any reference to the subject only seems to bewilder and excite him.

“My patient has asked me to write to you, explaining the circumstances, and he wishes me to urge you to come out to him here at once. He cannot return to England yet, as a change to a colder climate might prove fatal, and it would not even be safe to take him to Cairo, or, indeed, to attempt to move him away from Luxor.

“Mr Feilden is quite positive that you will do as he wishes, and I think he hardly realises how many years have passed since he left England. However, ten years is a long time, and it may, of course, be quite impossible for you to come to Egypt, but, if you are able to do so, it would, I am sure, be most beneficial to my patient.

“I enclose a letter that I have written at Mr Feilden’s dictation. Owing to his blindness, he is, unfortunately, unable to write to you himself.

“I considered it best to write to you in this manner, explaining everything, instead of telegraphing in the first instance. The news will be a great surprise, and I wish to save you in the matter as much as possible.—Believe me, yours faithfully,

“HENRY HAYNES.”

Elizabeth read this letter through twice before she turned to the other enclosure, not because she failed to grasp its meaning at first, but because the cool, sensible words, and rather formal phrasing of the

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writer, served, as, perhaps, nothing else could have done so well, to bring the actual truth of the strange story home to her mind.

Jack was alive, he had not been drowned after all. He was alive, and she would be able to pick up the broken threads of her life where they had been torn asunder so roughly ten years ago.

Ten years! They seemed nothing to Betty at that moment, and the letter which she now read, the letter from Jack himself, only served to bridge over the interval more completely. It might, indeed, almost have been written in direct sequence to those other letters from Egypt, which were hidden away in a carved wooden box in her room upstairs.

It was simply one of his old love-letters, full of light-hearted expectancy and confidence that she would be ready to obey his wishes and go out to him at Luxor without delay.

“I have had a rotten time, darling”—the letter said, and that was the only reference made to his past sufferings—“a beastly time, but it is all over now. You will come out here, I know, and then we can be married at once, if you like, or we will stay here until the winter is over in England, and then go home and have the wedding in the little church at Beggar’s Bush, as we arranged before. There shall be children scattering flowers, and the place all done up with bluebells and primroses. I have not forgotten any of the things that we used to talk about. I would come home to you at once, Betty dear, if I could, but I am rather a wreck, just at present.”

Elizabeth gathered all the loose sheets of paper together and pressed them tightly against her heart.

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It was all over now, as he said, all the misery and the pain and the loneliness. Those ten terrible years were blotted out, and everything that had been snatched away from her so ruthlessly was to be restored. She had the right to be happy again, contented and light-hearted as she had been in the old days, for Jack, her Jack, who had been dead for so long, was alive.

Elizabeth was so completely bewildered and dazed by the shock of her newly-returned happiness that she did not realise then, nor, indeed, for some time after that first evening, what Feilden must, of necessity, have suffered during the long years of their separation.

She hardly seemed to be able to grasp the fact that he had really lived through all those intervening months and days and hours. It was to her as if he had actually been dead and was now alive again, restored to her, in some wonderful and incomprehensible manner, from the grave itself.

She was still sitting there by the fire, staring at the glowing embers with soft, dreamy eyes, and with the letters clasped in her hands, when the door opened, and Nurse, carrying a tea-tray, came into the room. Betty started to her feet, and faced the astonished, little woman with flushed cheeks and smiling lips.

"Oh, Nurse," she cried, and there was a joyous ring that had not been heard for many years in her voice, "Nurse, I have had news, wonderful news. Mr Feilden is alive, do you hear? He is alive, not dead, and I have had a letter from him to-night."

CHAPTER IV

"It's delicious, Betty, simply splendid. And to think that I shall have you with me all the winter. I can never be grateful enough to Mr Feilden for coming to life again at such a very convenient time, or to Dot for getting ill and being ordered abroad. It really seems too delightful and too impossible to be true."

Mrs Brown finished her speech with a breathless little laugh, and Elizabeth joined in her merriment gaily. "I can hardly believe it myself yet," she said. "But I am so glad, Rose, that you approve of my plans. Most people seem to think that I ought to wait quietly in England until Jack comes home in the spring. They consider that I am unladylike and improper—almost an adventuress, in fact—even to dream of going out to him in Egypt."

Rose laughed again. "Oh, you need not be at all afraid that I shall discourage you," she answered. "Think what a comfort it will be for me to have you and Nurse with me—I am so delighted to hear that you are taking Nurse, Betty, and, besides, the whole thing is just like a story-book, and I am looking forward immensely to going with you to Luxor and seeing the grand finale of the romance."

Rose Brown was a pretty, little woman, with merry, dark eyes and the most charming smile in the world. She was looking a little pale and anxious, for she had been terribly worried lately about the health of her

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delicate child. However, the news of Betty's happiness had restored her spirits wonderfully, and she had agreed without hesitation in the proposal that she and Dot should arrange to spend the winter in Egypt and that she should act as chaperon and companion to her sister-in-law.

All Elizabeth's arrangements had been made very quickly, for she was unwilling to delay any longer than was absolutely necessary in England. Old Nurse had, from the first, announced her intention of accompanying her mistress to Luxor, and now they had come up to London to finish the preparations for the long journey.

As the two women sat opposite to each other by the fire, in the hotel sitting-room, Rose Brown found it very difficult to believe that only a fortnight had elapsed since she had last seen Betty at Beggar's Bush. All the sadness and listless apathy had vanished now from the beautiful face, the blue eyes were sparkling with animation, and there was a touch of rosy colour in the pale cheeks.

It was as if a magician's wand had been waved over her head, so that the chatelaine of the Dower House had vanished away and given place to the merry, light-hearted girl of long ago.

In after years Elizabeth used to feel that she had only a very vague and misty impression of the weeks that elapsed between the arrival of the first letters from Egypt and the day when she started off on her long journey.

The hurry and bustle of that time, and the rush of preparations and farewells all served to confuse and bewilder her, so that she was conscious of very little beyond the one great fact that Jack was alive, and that, therefore, her solitude was at an end and nothing

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but joy and unspeakable happiness was to be her portion.

The only cloud upon her horizon, the only drawback to her perfect contentment, was the memory of Feilden's blindness; but, whenever this disturbing thought crept into her mind, she comforted herself with wonderful plans for the future and with the resolution that her devotion should make up to Jack for all his unknown sufferings, and even wipe away the horrors of those ten, wasted years from his life.

When at last all Rose Brown's many questions had been answered and her curiosity satisfied, for the time, at least, Betty got up from her seat, and, kneeling down on the hearthrug, took her sister-in-law's small hands in hers.

"There is one thing I want to ask you, Rosie," she said earnestly, "one great favour that you must do for me, and it is this. Ever since the news came, I have been pestered and worried nearly out of my life. People have cross-questioned me and stared at me, as if I were a celebrity or a wild beast. I can't stand it any longer, dear, I simply can't, so you must promise that you won't tell anyone anything about me till we get to Luxor. After that it will not matter, for I shall have Jack to take care of me."

"Very well, Betty," Rose agreed without a moment's demur. "And, as it happens, I have a favour to ask you as well. Will you do something for me, dear, just a little thing, if I promise to keep your secret?"

Elizabeth stooped and kissed the other's hand. "Of course I will," she answered, "I will do anything. You are a darling, Rose, tell me what it is that you want."

There was a long pause, during which Mrs Brown

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stared thoughtfully into the fire, then she glanced across the room to where a thin, little girl of seven, with a pair of dark eyes that looked much too large for her pale face, was playing with a Persian kitten.

"Run away to Nurse, Dot," she said, "and ask her to take you out for a walk. It is fine now, and, yes, you can take the kitten with you."

When the child had disappeared, Rose turned to her sister-in-law again.

"How do you think Dot is looking?" she asked. "Oh, I know," as the other hesitated. "You need not answer, but I am worried to death about her, and I would give anything in the world to know that she is going to get quite well again."

Betty hastened to reassure her.

"It will be all right, dear," she said. "Everyone says that the climate of Egypt is simply marvellous. Dot will be quite fat and strong before we come back to England."

"Oh, yes, perhaps." Rose spoke with some hesitation. "You will think me an awful little fool, I expect, Betty, but, well, there is the most wonderful fortune-teller in London now. Everybody is raving about her, and I must, yes, I must take Dot to have her fortune told before we go out to Egypt."

Elizabeth smiled. Beggar's Bush is an out-of-the-way place, and the modern craze for fortune-tellers and crystal-gazers is unknown there. She had never imagined that it was possible for sensible people to take such things seriously, but still, if it would please Rose, she was quite willing to assist her in the fulfilment of any whim or fancy, however foolish and childlike it might appear to be.

"This is most exciting, Rose," she said, with a smile. "Where does this mysterious lady live?"

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We might take Dot to consult her this very afternoon."

"No, we won't take Dot to-day." There was still some hesitation in Rose's voice, and, as Betty leaned forward, she could see that the brown eyes were full of tears. "I'm nervous, and although it would be a tremendous relief to hear that the child was going to have a long, happy life, I dare not take her—yet. If the woman is a fraud after all, and sees Dot looking pale and ill, she might say—she might say—Oh, can't you understand, Betty, I want to hear someone else's fortune told first, so that I may know whether this Madame Braithwaite really speaks the truth."

"I see," said Elizabeth, gently. "Then I suppose that you mean to let her tell your fortune before she sees Dot?"

Rose shook her head. "No," she said, "not mine. I have had my fortune told any number of times in India, and it has always been utter nonsense. One man said that I was going to have ten sons and live to be a hundred. I suppose I am a bad subject, or something. No, Betty dear, it is you that must have your fortune told first. You have had such a strange story, that, if Madame Braithwaite can tell what has happened to you, she must be trustworthy." She reads the past, you know, as well as the future, and, if she finds out about you and Mr Feilden, I shall be able to believe every word that she says."

Rose's face was full of anxiety as she spoke, and Elizabeth agreed to the proposal without demur. The affair seemed to her to be nothing but a jest, and she was quite ready to undertake the part that had been allotted to her. There was, besides, a spice of excitement and novelty about the expedition that was far from being unpleasant, and when, a little later,

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they drove through the crowded streets to the house of the fortune-teller, she felt as if she were another person entirely to the staid, serious Miss Cathcart of Beggar's Bush, and as if her wonderful new life of happiness and novelty had really begun.

She smiled to herself, as she leaned back comfortably in her corner of the carriage, for she could not help picturing the feelings of her friends and relations in the dull, little country village if they should chance to hear of this new escapade, but Rose Brown, when this idea was suggested to her, only joined very half-heartedly in her sister-in-law's merriment.

She seemed to be in a fever of suspense and excitement, and it was evident that she was racked with anxiety and dread as to her child's health and future. However foolish and fantastic this visit to the fortune-teller might seem to other people, there could be no doubt that to poor Rose it was an undertaking of supreme importance.

The house of the mysterious Madame Braithwaite proved to be a very dull and commonplace abode, when, at last, they drove up to the door, and even Betty's high spirits sank a little as they mounted a narrow, dingy staircase, and were ushered into a shabby apartment, in which a number of uncomfortable, velvet-covered chairs, and some back numbers of *Punch* awoke cheerless reminiscences of visits to a dentist's waiting-room.

A depressed-looking boy in buttons accompanied them upstairs, and informed them that Madame was, at present, engaged.

It was evident that the services of the fortune-teller were in great demand, for a couple of fashionably-dressed women were already established in the waiting-room, and, before many minutes had passed,

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their numbers were swelled by the arrival of a pale-faced girl in an enormous black hat, a hospital nurse in uniform, and an excessively nervous young man.

Elizabeth was amused to find that her assent to the scheme had been entirely taken for granted by her friend, and that Rose had written to make an appointment with Madame Braithwaite. In consequence they did not have to wait very long, and, in less than a quarter of an hour, the boy threw open the door again, and announced that Madame was ready to receive them.

Unlike most dealers in the occult sciences, Madame Braithwaite did not insist upon it that her clients should be alone when they visited her, so, when the summons came, Rose followed her sister-in-law out of the room, and accompanied her along a narrow passage and up a flight of steep, uncarpeted stairs.

There was nothing very alarming or mysterious about the apartment into which they were now escorted, nor about the woman who was awaiting them there, but Betty could feel that Rose's hand on her arm trembled violently, and she could see that all the colour had faded out of the small, piquante face. For the first time she regretted that she had agreed to embark on this foolish enterprise, but, as it was too late now to draw back, she whispered a few words of encouragement into the other's ear and advanced boldly into the room.

Madame Braithwaite glanced up listlessly as her clients entered, and murmured a perfunctory greeting in a low, indifferent voice.

She was a small, sallow woman, with a wide, discontented mouth, and an untidy tangle of flaxen hair. The only noticeable feature in her face was a pair of strange, greenish-blue eyes, with pupils which seemed

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to contract and dilate from moment to moment. She was attired in a shabby black dress, and a string of yellow amber beads hung round her neck. On a table beside which she was standing was a red-shaded lamp, and near it lay a crystal ball and a couple of packs of cards.

The room was close and rather dark, for the lamp only gave a feeble light, and thick moreen curtains had been drawn across the narrow windows.

The fortune-teller, having ascertained which of the two ladies it was who wished to have her past and future read, set about her preparations in a very businesslike and matter-of-fact manner. It was quite evident that her dabblings with the occult were mere everyday affairs, and that, to her, there was no glamour of romance or mystery about her strange profession.

Betty felt vaguely disappointed at the commonplace aspect of the crystal-gazer and her surroundings. She had read of dark pools of ink, braziers with ascending clouds of incense, cabalistic signs, and strange, mysterious women with trailing garments and black, unfathomable eyes. After these highly-coloured dreams the reality seemed absurdly sordid and uninteresting, and she wished heartily that the interview was at an end and that they were free to make their escape from the stuffy gloom of the little room.

The fortune-teller stared at Elizabeth's face intently for a moment or two, and then asked her to take off her gloves, speaking in a bored, indifferent voice with a pronounced Cockney accent.

She examined the palms of her client's hands carefully, and, when this scrutiny was at an end, gave her the crystal ball to hold, and, picking up one

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of the packs of cards, shuffled them with swift dexterity and spread them out on the table. Elizabeth watched all the proceedings with amusement, while Rose leaned forward with an expression of intense and painful eagerness in her anxious face.

It was almost as if she expected Dot's fate and future, as well as Betty's, to be revealed.

From outside there came the distant roar of the traffic in a neighbouring thoroughfare, but within the room there was silence, broken only by the soft movements of the fortune-teller, as she dealt out the cards, and the jingle of the bracelets on Rose Brown's restless hands.

It was a curious sight, the three faces grouped together round the table, under the light of the shaded lamp. Elizabeth, pale and beautiful, with her blue eyes, thick waves of fair hair, and interested, but slightly disdainful, smile. Rose's face, almost pathetic in its nervousness, and the commonplace, vulgar countenance of Madame herself.

The latter began to speak, while Elizabeth still held the crystal between her hands.

"You have had trouble in your life," she said. "Trouble, illness and death. There has been a love affair. You were engaged to a fair man, when you were very young, but something parted you, it was not death, and after many years you will meet again. There are sorrows in your life, but I see happiness and marriage in the future."

Betty smiled, and shrugged her shoulders slightly, as she caught Rose's eyes across the table. There was truth, certainly, in what the woman told her, but nothing so very astonishing or out of the way. Marriage, partings, illness, death. Did not even the old gipsy crones and the bazaar palmists deal out

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these items with an impartial hand? Madame had made some good guesses, but that was all, her occult powers had been decidedly over-rated.

The next moment she took the glass ball from Betty's hand and laid it on the polished surface of the table, then, stooping forward, she stared into it fixedly. The pupils of her strange eyes contracted, and an expression of absorbed intensity replaced the indifference in her vulgar, commonplace face.

Rose leaned forward eagerly, and even Elizabeth felt a thrill of interest and excitement pass through her.

"I see a ship," the fortune-teller said, "a large ship, and it is not at sea, but in a town. The sky is red, and the water is red, too, like the sky. There are other ships, and flat boats near them filled with coal. Black men run backwards and forwards, carrying coal from the boats to the ship. On the shore there are tall houses with balconies. The people wear turbans or red caps with tassels. You are leaning over the side of the ship."

"Port Said. It is Port Said," said Rose in a breathless whisper, but the woman's eyes were still fixed intently on the glass ball.

"I can see a small, dark room, like a cell," she went on, after a moment's silence. "There are pictures cut on the walls, and there is a stone image, with a cat's head. A man is kneeling on the floor of the room. He is looking for something, and searches with his hands on the ground. There is sand on the ground. I can see you standing at the door, watching him, and—and there is danger. I cannot tell what it is, I cannot see clearly."

She raised her head, and covered the crystal with her hands, as if unwilling to look into it further.

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Her eyes were still dilated, and there was a faint look of alarm on her pale, indifferent face.

Rose was trembling with suppressed excitement. Elizabeth leaned forward and touched the fortune-teller's arm gently.

"Let us hear some more," she begged. "It is very interesting. Look into the ball again, and see if you can see me once more."

The woman glanced up at her, and then obeyed with visible reluctance.

"I can see you again," she said. "But it is in a different place. There is a boat with a slanting sail. On the bank of the river is a ruined building. There are many pillars, and some of them are broken. Beyond are trees with feathery branches. Many large birds are flying about. You are standing near one of the pillars, and there is a man with you. He is holding your hands in his."

She paused. Rose gave a nervous laugh, and Betty could feel that her cheeks were flushing and that the breath came quickly through her lips as she listened.

It was Luxor, of course, the temple of Luxor. Jack had described it in his letters long ago. He had written of the ruins, the green palm trees, and the broad, smooth-flowing river beyond.

And this woman, who knew nothing about her, who could know nothing about her, saw her standing there, as she surely would stand, in the near future, with Jack himself. What could it mean? What strange, unnatural powers were at work?

It was horrible, uncanny. Betty felt a cold shiver run through her limbs, and she glanced fearfully over her shoulder. Then the fortune-teller began to speak again.

There was some little hesitation in her voice now,

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and she leaned over the table until her eyes were within a few inches of the crystal ball.

"It is indistinct. I cannot see clearly, but it is the river bank again, another part of the bank. Something is happening. There is a crowd of people, they wear strange dresses, and their faces are dark. Some women are there, with large pots on their heads, and a black boy, leading a donkey. I see a woman in a white dress, I think it is you. The crowd are watching two men that seem to be fighting—struggling—together. One of the men is an Englishman, and—and—"

The voice stopped, but the woman did not lift her eyes from the crystal, and for a minute or two there was silence. Rose gripped Betty's arm convulsively, and her breath came in quick, excited gasps. A strange, unnatural tension, like a vague presentiment of disaster, seemed to pervade the dull, shabby little room.

"Well," whispered Rose. "Well, what is it? What do you see?"

Madame Braithwaite raised her eyes slowly, and looked from one to the other of the two eager faces. Then she shook her head.

"That is all," she said. "The last picture was blurred and indistinct. I can tell you nothing more."

She pushed the ball away from her, as if to indicate that the *séance* was at an end, and Elizabeth, peering into it for an instant, seemed to see shadowy figures moving within its depths.

Was there anything there, really? She asked herself, or were those dim shapes only the result of unusual excitement and an overwrought imagination? She leaned forward, in order to see clearly,

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but, even as she did so, the crystal cleared as the breath clears away from a clouded window-pane, and there was nothing but the transparent ball of glass lying before her upon the polished surface of the table.

"So that is all?" Rose repeated the words with something that was very like a sigh of relief. She began to refasten the sable stole at her throat, for the room was warm and she had slipped it from her shoulders. The bright colour had come back to her cheeks, and she turned to Betty eagerly.

"Is it not wonderful?" she cried. "Simply marvellous. That was Egypt, of course. She described Port Said to the life, and the other place must have been Luxor. She could actually see you in Egypt, Betty, and you are going there next week. She saw you and Mr Feilden together. Nobody would ever believe it, would they? And tell me,"—she turned quickly to Madame, who was still standing at the table, listlessly shuffling the pack of cards—"Tell me. This man, who was in the ruins with my friend, what was he like?"

The fortune-teller looked up. There was a puzzled expression on her face, and she waited for a moment before she answered.

"He had blue eyes," she said at last. "Yes, he had blue eyes."

She paused again, as if doubtful whether she should say anything further or not. Then she shrugged her narrow shoulders and let the cards fall from her hands on to the table.

"He had blue eyes," she repeated, for the third time. "That is all. I can tell you nothing more, but—but there was another man, a black man, I suppose he was a negro, or something like that. He had a scar across his face. There was danger, I do

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not know what it was. It was all misty and indistinct. I can tell you nothing more. Will you go now, please, there are other people waiting to see me."

When they were in the carriage again, on the way back to the hotel, Rose was still full of the wonderful things which they had heard. She had recovered her spirits and courage now that they were out of the dark, shabby little house, but, with regard to Dot, her mood had changed completely. She never wished to see Madame Braithwaite again, she declared, and nothing in the world would induce her to have the child's fortune told by anyone

"One has to believe it," she cried. "One cannot help it, can one, Elizabeth? And it would kill me, yes, I am quite sure that it would kill me, if she said that anything was going to happen to Dot. She did not say anything bad about your fortune, Betty, but she might about Dot's. If she had made mistakes, even one mistake, in what she said to-day, it would have been different, for I could have said then that she was a fraud, but she did not make any mistakes. It was all true. She saw you, and Egypt, and Mr Feilden. It was simply wonderful, wasn't it? marvellous, but I shall never dare to go to a palmist or a crystal-gazer again."

Elizabeth laughed reassuringly. Now that they were safely out of the house of the mysterious sooth-sayer, the strange, uncanny sensation was beginning to leave her, and she could afford to smile at the adventure.

"If that is all that worries you, Rose dear," she said, "You can take Dot to have her fortune told to-morrow quite safely. It is all very extraordinary, I know that, and I don't understand it a bit, but she

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did make one mistake, and it was a bad one, too, I can assure you. When you asked what Jack was like she said that he had blue eyes. You remember that, don't you? And, of course, it was wrong, absolutely wrong. Although Jack is fair, his eyes are quite dark brown, Rosie, as dark as your own eyes, or as little Dot's."

CHAPTER V

“ AND so this is what you call the Sewage Canal? ” said Nurse, looking round her with a sniff of disdain. “ The Sewage Canal, and a good name for it too, says I, for a nastier, dirtier place I never did see in all my born days. And the people, too. Look at that there 'eathen carrying them boxes, if 'e ain't for all the world like my picture at 'ome of Christian with 'is bunyan on 'is back. Come away from that rail, Miss Dot. It's as black as ever it can be, and if you go climbing of it, your nice white frock won't be fit to be seen in another minute.”

It was more than a week after the visit to the fortune-teller's house, and the P. and O. steamer had just arrived at Port Said. The Egyptian passengers were gathered together on the deck, awaiting the arrival of the launch that was to take them ashore, and there was the usual bustle and confusion of arrival and departure. Guides and hotel porters were pushing their way clamorously through the throng, the decks were strewn with baggage, and a native conjuror was already making preparations for an exhibition of his skill. Old Nurse was employed in keeping anxious watch over Dot, and in staring, with shocked amazement, at the strange sights which met her eyes on every side. Her mistress, Elizabeth Cathcart, meanwhile had moved away from the eager, chattering groups of her fellow-passengers, and was standing, leaning against the

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rail, with a sensation that was very like fear at her heart.

It was late afternoon—sunset time, and behind the tall balconied houses of the town the sky was ablaze with crimson and orange and rose. The vivid colours were reflected in the smooth water, so that the vessels in the canal looked as if they were floating on a sea of blood. Near at hand a steamer was being coaled, and the warm air seemed to be full of the grit and haze of coal dust. Elizabeth could see the black barges alongside the steamer and the figures of the natives running swiftly backwards and forwards with baskets of coal on their heads. There was a crowd of small boats round the companion of the newly-arrived liner, and the sound of harsh, Arab voices mingled with the gay laughter of the passengers and the jangle of the cranes, as the baggage was swung up from the open hatchways.

“The sky is red, and the water is red too. There are boats filled with coal, and I can see men carrying coal from the boats to a ship.”

Everything combined to bring the words of the fortune-teller back to Elizabeth's mind with an almost unnatural distinctness, and she seemed to see again, quite clearly, Rose's frightened face and Madame Braithwaite's strange, dilated eyes. Her breath came quickly and her hands trembled, as she realised that this was actually the scene and the place which had been described.

It was all true then. There had been no fraud or deception about the affair. The woman had really possessed the mysterious powers to which she had laid claim. She had been able to foretell the future, and, if her first prophecy had already been fulfilled, was it not possible, and even likely, that her further

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and more sinister predictions would also prove to be correct?

The whole thing was undoubtedly uncanny and alarming. Betty shivered, as if with sudden cold, although the air was warm and balmy, and then started at the touch of a hand on her shoulder, and turned to meet Rose Brown's mischievous, dark eyes.

"Come, Betty, the launch is waiting, and, tell me, what do you think of my fortune-teller now? You were sceptical, I know, and thought me quite an idiot, but, surely, all this must convince even you."

Elizabeth followed her sister-in-law down the companion in silence, and it was some time before the unpleasant impression which had been made by the fulfilment of the clairvoyant's words passed away from her mind.

Again and again during the weary time of waiting in the custom-house and the subsequent drive up to the railway station did the thought of those strange prophecies recur to her, and it was only the remembrance of the one undeniable mistake that Madame Braithwaite had made which served, at last, to allay her uneasy fears.

"She said that Jack had blue eyes." Betty smiled to herself with satisfaction as she recalled the words, for, if the fortune-teller had made one error, she was, at all events, not infallible, and it was quite possible that the whole affair had been nothing but a combination of charlatanry and clever guesses.

Ever since the day of the departure from London, Mrs Brown, as the most experienced traveller, had taken the management of affairs into her own hands, and it was her decree that a couple of days should be spent in Cairo, and that then, as little Dot's health

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was of paramount importance, the final stage of the journey to Luxor should be made by steamer.

"They say that railway travelling in Egypt is frightfully tiring," she had explained to her sister-in-law. "And I could not think of it for Dot. You can go by train, of course, if you like, Betty, but, really, when you have not seen Mr Feilden for ten years, six or seven days cannot make very much difference."

Elizabeth had fallen in with these plans readily enough, for, although she was looking forward with joyful eagerness to her meeting with Jack, she had not yet recovered completely from the bewildering hurry and excitement of the past few weeks, and the prospect of the quiet interlude which the Nile voyage would afford was, by no means, unwelcome.

It was late at night when Cairo was reached, and the travellers were far too much exhausted to notice anything as they drove through the crowded streets from the railway station; but when Betty came downstairs on the following morning, and went out on to the broad terrace in front of the hotel, she felt as if she had been suddenly transplanted into a new world.

It was a beautiful day, more like June than December, and the sun gleamed brightly on the waving palm trees, on the tall houses and on the motley crowd of natives and Europeans who thronged the road.

In front of the hotel a couple of blue-clad donkey-boys were having a furious dispute with a native policeman. Arab hawkers offered bead necklaces, quaint weapons and antiquities of all sorts for her inspection, a long line of camels laden with green fodder came swaying along the street, and a band

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was playing in the Esbekieh gardens close at hand.

Elizabeth stood looking about her with wide-open, blue eyes and attentive ears, enjoying everything with the keen delight and eagerness of a child, and she turned away from the animated scene with reluctance when Mrs Brown sent Dot to summon her to breakfast and to a consultation on the plans for the disposal of the day.

Rose was not alone when her sister-in-law joined her in the hall of the hotel. A tall, broad-shouldered man was standing at her side, and she hastened to introduce him to Betty with many eager explanations and expressive waves of her small hands.

"Oh, Betty darling, such a delightful thing has happened. This is Major Kerr. I must have spoken of him to you dozens of times. He is Dot's godfather, and we have known him for years and years. I have just this moment found him here, and he is actually going up to Luxor by our boat to-morrow. Is not it charming? He only arrived from India last week, and he is to stay in Egypt for the whole winter. Major Kerr, you must come out to Mena with us this afternoon. We have only one day in Cairo, but it would be wicked not to show Betty and Dot the Pyramids and the Sphinx."

An interruption came at this point, for Dot, who had waited at the door of the hotel to examine some postcards, now darted forward to greet her godfather with all her customary effusion. During the conversation that followed, Elizabeth glanced more than once at her new acquaintance, and she came to the conclusion that she had never seen a stronger face or one more calculated to inspire confidence and respect.

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Kerr was not, perhaps, a remarkably handsome man, although his tall figure was well-knit and muscular, and there was an air of authority and self-reliance—as of one accustomed to command and to be obeyed—about his whole bearing and demeanour.

His jaw was too square, his chin too obstinate, but the features altogether were well cut, the forehead broad, and the mouth, which was almost hidden by a dark moustache, was kindly in expression, besides being firm and determined.

“A soldier, every inch of him,” that was an expression that was often used to describe Bertram Kerr, and, while he was invariably popular with men, and children were devoted to him, most women declared that his face was so stern as to be almost forbidding and that he was far too silent and too reserved to be by any means an amusing or an attractive companion.

It was evident, however, that Rose Brown was an exception to this rule, and when, a few minutes later, they all went in to breakfast together, the plans for the expedition to the Pyramids were complete.

Elizabeth Cathcart used to think afterwards, when she remembered all the events and impressions of that first day in Egypt, that it had been one of the happiest and most delightful of her whole life.

They went out to Mena early in the afternoon, and when they had inspected the Sphinx, the Pyramids and the granite temple, and had carried out the whole of the orthodox tourist's programme, they dismissed their guide and strolled on past the Arab cemetery and up the sandy slopes of the hill on the other side of the valley.

There was plenty of time to spare before it was necessary to return to Cairo, and the view from the hill promised to be a beautiful one. Besides this

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Dot had been told by the guide that mummy beads and other interesting antiquities were to be found in the vicinity, and she was naturally *anxious to do a little excavating on her own account.*

The loose sand made walking difficult and fatiguing, and, before long, Rose announced that she should go no further. She seated herself comfortably in a patch of shade, and Dot began her operations near at hand. Elizabeth and Major Kerr strolled on, and did not halt until they had reached the summit of the hill. Then they turned and stood for some minutes in silence, gazing at the wonderful scene which was spread out before their eyes.

Beneath them was the flat Nile valley, with its long lines of palm trees and smooth stretches of water in which the turquoise of the sky was reflected. There were streaks of purple and violet shadows, brown mud villages which showed bright touches of pink and yellow-washed walls, and the vivid emerald green of new vegetation.

Away to the east sparkled and glowed the far-off city of Cairo, dominated by the fortress on the hill in its rear. The slender alabaster minarets of the mosque stood out, with dainty distinctness, against the azure sky. The long raised roadway, from Mena to Gizeh, with its avenue of over-arching trees, seemed to divide the landscape into halves.

On either side of the wonderful, fertile valley there was the desert; on the one hand the bare range of the Mokattam Hills, and on the other the yellow stretch of the great plateau upon which they were standing, and of which the Pyramids themselves seemed to be an integral part.

The sands and rocks of the two confronting wilder-

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nesses seemed to enclose and surround the many-hued Delta plain completely.

It was like a posy of exquisite flowers clasped in a giant's hand—like a jewel in a setting of gold.

Elizabeth drew a long breath of absolute contentment and delight. "Is it not beautiful?" she said, and her eyes were still fixed upon the scene before her as she spoke. "I think that Egypt must be the most lovely country in the world."

Kerr did not contradict her, and the next moment she turned to him with a little laugh of amusement at her own words.

"I am such a good judge, am not I? When I have hardly been out of England in my life before, and even Dot looks upon me as a country cousin, and despises me accordingly. Is there really anything to be found here, Major Kerr? Anything old, I mean. One would think that this place must have been searched through ages and ages ago."

She seated herself on the ground as she spoke and began to delve in the warm, golden sand. Kerr threw himself down at her side.

"They find things right enough, I believe," he replied. "Mummy beads, you know, and scarabs, but whether they are genuine or not is another matter. Some people say that the Arabs bury spurious antiquities here, and then bring select parties of tourists to dig them up."

Betty was too intent on her task to answer, and the man leaned back on his elbow and watched her from beneath the brim of his grey felt hat.

She made a pretty picture, certainly, as she sat there, stooping forward a little, and groping with her slender white fingers in the yellow sand. Her face was as eager and contented as that of a child

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with a new toy, and the blue cloudless sky made a dainty background to her head and figure.

On the slopes beneath them Rose Brown and her little girl could be seen, and, further away, four or five Arabs were making their way slowly through the loose sand in the direction of the Sphinx and the steep path which leads up to the Pyramids beyond.

It was some time before Betty desisted from her search and raised herself from the hollow over which she had been stooping. She leaned back with a graceful, girlish stretch of her arms and a sigh of disappointment.

"Nothing," she said, "absolutely nothing, not even one paltry bead. This is evidently one of my unlucky days."

Kerr laughed at her discomfiture, and began to scoop out a hole for himself. "'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again,' that ought to be your motto if you take to excavating," and then he leaned forward suddenly with an exclamation of surprise, and, lifting a little blue object from the sand, held it out towards his companion. "Here is a splendid find at last, your luck has changed, and Dot will be frantically jealous when she sees what you have discovered."

Elizabeth took the new-found treasure and examined it closely. A little trinket, it seemed to be, about half an inch in length, and made of some sort of enamel. In colour it was the most brilliant and exquisite blue imaginable.

"How lovely!" she cried enthusiastically. "What is it, Major Kerr? The colour is exactly like a turquoise. I have never seen anything so pretty before."

Kerr had relinquished his excavating now and was leaning back against the warm sand.

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"I believe it is called 'The Key of Life,' " he said. "And it is an amulet, of sorts. You had better keep it, Miss Cathcart; a mascot four thousand years old ought to bring you any amount of good fortune."

"Four thousand years old." Elizabeth echoed the words in an awed voice. "Why, it looks as if it might have been made yesterday."

Kerr laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps it was made yesterday, or thereabouts, in Birmingham, who can tell? It would look well on that chain of yours, Miss Cathcart. If you will unfasten the clasp, I will thread it through that little ring at the back of the 'Key.' "

Elizabeth slipped off the long gold chain which she wore round her neck, and they were both intent on the business of fastening the amulet to it, when there came an interruption. A thin, dark hand was thrust forward suddenly between them, and a harsh voice grated on their astonished ears.

The little band of natives, who had been coming along the valley, had turned aside from their path, and mounted the slope towards the Europeans. Their bare feet had made no sound on the soft sand, and neither Betty nor Kerr noticed their approach.

The intruders were ragged and dirty, and one of the men was blind. A child of five or six years old was guiding his footsteps. As they came near, he took his master's hand, and, with a whining murmur of "Baksheesh," thrust it forward, almost into the Englishwoman's face.

Elizabeth sprang to her feet with a cry of horror and repugnance.

The interruption was, it is true, a totally unexpected one, but her startled blue eyes seemed to take in the

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meaning of the scene at a glance, and, at that same moment, the memory of Jack's sufferings, which always lurked like a dark shadow in the background of her mind, came forward and confronted her.

A blind Arab, and Jack Feilden—her lover—was blind too. He was blind, like this wretched beggar, who stood before her, ragged, filthy, and with groping, outstretched hands—Jack was blind, and it was one of these same natives who had maltreated and tortured him.

Kerr had risen to his feet quickly at the sound of Betty's cry of dismay, and, when he had dismissed the natives, he turned to her with a grave, concerned face.

She had not, during their brief acquaintanceship, struck him as being a timid or hysterical woman, and, even to one unaccustomed to the East and to Eastern ways, there is nothing very alarming in the sight of a few dark faces, some bright-eyed children, and a blind beggar.

Elizabeth recovered herself with an effort and tried to smile, but her cheeks were still pale and there was a little quiver in her voice when she spoke.

"You must think me very silly, Major Kerr, but I was startled, and—and, somehow, I could not bear the idea of that man touching me. It was foolish, of course, I know that, for the poor creature did not mean any harm."

"No, I don't think it foolish," answered Kerr. "It's a queer thing, but many people are like that, and simply loathe the sight of a dark skin. I remember a man I met out here once—I was in Egypt for a few weeks, you know, ten years ago, on my way out to India—well, this fellow couldn't stand the natives at any price, and I don't believe he had

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ever been out of England in his life before, or seen an Arab. 'Egypt wouldn't be a bad place, if it wasn't for the niggers,' that was what he used to say, and it explained how he felt exactly. Possibly it may be something of the same sort of thing with you."

They were walking down the steep, sandy slope in the direction of Rose and Dot. Elizabeth paused suddenly, and turned a pale, agitated face towards the speaker.

"No," she said, "No, it is not that. I have a reason for my dislike—a good reason, and that makes all the difference."

Kerr glanced at her with his keen blue eyes, but he did not ask her any further questions.

"Yes," he said quietly, after a moment's silence, "Yes, that makes all the difference."

CHAPTER VI

THERE were very few passengers on the Nile steamer, for it was still early in the season, and, therefore, as was only natural, and indeed inevitable, Elizabeth Cathcart and Major Kerr were thrown a great deal into each other's society during the quiet, monotonous days of the voyage. The two had many tastes and interests in common, and, besides this, Kerr's former friendship with Rose Brown and with her first husband, George Cathcart, constituted a strong bond of union.

Elizabeth found, before long, that she was growing to think of the man more as if he were an old and tried friend than a mere travelling acquaintance of a few days' standing, while as for Kerr he had, almost from the moment of their first meeting in Cairo, fallen completely under the spell of Betty's charm and beauty.

During the years of his busy, adventurous life in India he had had but little time for society and feminine companionship, and he was considered by most of his friends to be a misogynist and a confirmed bachelor, but now matters had changed completely. He realised that Betty accepted his attentions with an almost unconscious simplicity and never attempted to attract or encourage him in any way, but he knew, at the same time, that he was in love with her and that he would employ all his powers in the endeavour to win her heart.

Rose Brown had kept her promise faithfully and had never breathed a word about Betty's romantic story to her fellow-passengers, but now, perhaps,

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had she been much with her sister-in-law and Kerr, she might have seen fit to warn one or other of the pair. As it was, Dot had developed a bad cold after leaving Cairo, and her mother, being in close attendance upon her, had seen and heard very little of what was going on.

Kerr wondered sometimes, as he watched Betty, what her past history had been, and what was the meaning of the dreamy, abstracted expression that rested so often on her beautiful face.

She had had some great shock or sorrow in her life—he felt sure of that, and then he would glance at the band of diamonds on her left hand and tell himself that her lover had died long ago, and that she had remained unmarried for his sake.

Elizabeth herself, meanwhile, was so entirely absorbed in the thoughts of the coming meeting with Feilden that there was no room in her heart for any other consideration. She noticed nothing out of the ordinary in Kerr's manner, and it never, even for one moment, occurred to her that she was being treated with more than simple kindness and courtesy.

The growing intimacy between the two did not, however, pass entirely unnoticed, and one, at least, of the passengers eyed Betty with ever-increasing disapproval and annoyance.

There were two young ladies on board the Nile steamer, Miss Norton and Miss Gale by name, who had come out together to spend the winter in Egypt, and who, it was rumoured, hailed from Surbiton, and were in quest of amusement, adventures, and desirable husbands.

The younger of the pair was a harmless little person enough, but her friend, Gladys Norton, who was a good-looking, vulgar girl of about twenty-four, was

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possessed of a jealous, spiteful disposition and a fiery temper. She had made up her mind, very early in the voyage, that Major Kerr was, without exception, the handsomest man on board the ship, and had, consequently, left no stone unturned in her endeavours to attract his notice and win his admiration.

It was, perhaps, hardly surprising, therefore, that, when all her efforts proved to be unavailing, Miss Norton should look upon Elizabeth as her rival, and condemn her character and conduct in no measured terms.

"I call her a perfectly detestable woman," she declared to Mabel Gale on one occasion, "and it's my belief that she's thirty if she's a day, and that she paints her face and dyes her hair. I can't understand how anyone can admire her, and as to her behaviour, well, the less said about that the better. Look at her now, sitting with the Major, as usual. It's disgraceful. I hate her, with her head in the air and her haughty ways—yes, I hate her, and, if I only had a chance, I would be even with her yet."

It was on the last afternoon of the voyage to Luxor that Miss Norton uttered this speech, but she little thought, as she spoke, that she would have an opportunity, that very same evening, of revenging herself on Betty, and of punishing her for the fancied slights and insults of the past week.

It was a delightful evening, warm, clear and starlit, and, after dinner, the passengers assembled on the open space of deck amidships.

There was no piano on board, but Miss Gale had a guitar, and as she was, moreover, possessed of an unusually beautiful soprano voice, there had been a little concert, and she had sung one coon song or

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music-hall ditty after another, while the listeners applauded vehemently and joined now and again in the familiar choruses.

It is needless to say that Mabel's talent did not by any means endear her to her friend, Miss Norton, for the latter, while greedy of admiration for herself, disliked exceedingly to hear other people praised or complimented.

Elizabeth Cathcart had sat for some little time on the outskirts of the throng, listening to the fresh girlish voice that was strangely like what her own had been ten years ago, but, at last, she got up noiselessly, strolled round the saloon, and seated herself in a low chair on the deserted, forward portion of the deck.

It was the last evening of the voyage, to-morrow she should see Jack again, and she felt that she must be alone and undisturbed to think over all the wonderful happiness that was in store for her.

During the first few days after her arrival in Egypt Betty's mind had been troubled at times by vague fears and misgivings. She had brooded over the thought of Feilden's blindness, and had asked herself whether he would find her changed, and whether he would love her as he had done in the old days, but gradually the spell of the strange, fascinating country had had its effect upon her, and, under the soothing influence of the fatalistic and unchanging East, her uneasy fears had faded away and lost their power.

Everything would be all right, she told herself with joyful certainty, of course everything would be all right. Jack was the same Jack as he had always been, and she was the same Betty. Nothing could ever change or diminish her love, and why then should

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she distrust him and imagine that he would prove to be less faithful? The letters which she had received since his reappearance told her, beyond a shadow of doubt, that he cared for her with all his old fervour, and surely then, whatever happened, nothing could really matter, for the strength of his love and hers together would be enough to sweep away all difficulties and to preclude any possibility of pain or disappointment.

Elizabeth was feeling more than usually joyful and confident this evening, for a fresh breeze was blowing across the desert, and it seemed to bring with it a breath of freedom and a vision of the boundless waste spaces of the world.

There was no moon, but the stars were marvelously bright, and the spangled sky was reflected vividly in the smooth, glassy surface of the river. As the little vessel—itsself ablaze with lights—steamed steadily forward, it might almost have been a tiny planet moving on its way through the star-strewn heavens.

The verse which had always seemed to be woven into the very fabric of Elizabeth's life came into her mind now, and she repeated the words to herself in a low whisper:

"The night hath a thousand eyes and the day but one,
Yet the light of the whole world dies with the dying sun."

She felt as if she had never realised the truth of the words so fully as now. "The country of the setting sun" she had heard someone call Egypt, and, certainly, the name was a fitting one for this wonderful land of passing glories, of ruined temples, and of strange dead gods.

"The mind hath a thousand eyes and the heart but one,
Yet the light of a whole life dies when love is done."

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There was the sound of a firm footstep coming along the deck, and she glanced up to find that Major Kerr was standing at her side.

Meanwhile, at a little distance, the impromptu concert had been going on gaily, and Gladys Norton had grown more irate and discontented every moment; and at last, when "The Swanee River" had received a rapturous encore, she felt that she could bear it no longer. She started up from her seat, seized Mabel's arm, and drew her away from the midst of the little audience.

"Come, Mabel, please, at once, I have something important to say to you. No, you must not think of singing again. Your voice will be ruined if you strain it in this ridiculous manner."

Miss Gale cast one horrified glance at her friend's angry face, and then allowed herself to be led—or rather dragged—away, without a word of remonstrance.

When the two girls were alone in the deserted saloon, Gladys pushed her victim roughly into a seat and began to upbraid her, in no measured terms, for what she designated as her fast and unladylike behaviour.

"The way you sat there with that absurd guitar was simply disgusting. You will be the laughing-stock of the whole ship, and I am quite ashamed of you. If you are not careful I will write to your mother by the next mail."

Poor Miss Gale was completely overcome by this violent attack, and, leaning back against the cushioned seat, she burst into a copious flood of tears.

"I did not mean any harm, Gladys, indeed I did not mean to annoy you," she pleaded, but the other was not to be appeased by any signs of penitence or submission, and as she allowed her rage to have

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its way her angry voice became louder and her speech more vehement and unbridled.

"I suppose you are taking that hateful woman as a pattern. A nice example she is for any girl, I must say. I only wish that I could give her a bit of my mind. Detestable flirt. No doubt she thinks that she's caught that man finely, but it's quite possible that she will be disappointed yet. He's just the sort of cad to carry on with a girl one day and give her the cold shoulder the next. His name ought to be pronounced as it's spelt—Cur. Oh, I've no doubt that she expects him to propose to her, but, all the same, I don't believe that your grand Miss Cathcart will ever be invited to become Mrs Major Kerr."

At the beginning of this tirade Miss Norton's utterance had been so much choked with rage and mortification that she had been heard by her weeping listener alone, but, after a time, as she warmed to her task, the words were spoken more distinctly. She paced up and down the little saloon, with flashing eyes and gesticulating hands, and the last sentence of her speech was delivered as she stood near one of the open windows. Quite close to this window two people, a man and a woman, were standing together on the starlit deck, but their proximity was not noticed by the irate young lady.

Every syllable that she uttered was, however, distinctly audible, and thus, although she was quite unconscious of it herself, Miss Norton had her wish, and succeeded in giving Elizabeth Cathcart a piece—and a very unpleasant piece too—of her mind.

For a few moments the two listeners confronted each other in amazed silence, and then Elizabeth rose quietly to her feet. She drew herself up proudly

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to her full height and the warm colour flushed into her cheeks.

Kerr's sunburnt hands were clenched tightly on the wooden rail in front of him, and there was a gleam of anger in his eyes. He turned slightly away from his companion and stared fixedly at the starlit water and dusky line of river bank.

It was a horrible situation, and, almost worse than that, a ridiculous one. Elizabeth's blood boiled at the thought of the causeless spite and vulgarity of the girl who had subjected her to such an intolerable affront, but the thing was done now, the insulting speech had been uttered; and the only possible course to pursue was to treat the whole incident with the scorn and indifference that it deserved.

She managed to recover her composure with an effort and forced her lips into the semblance of a smile.

"How absurd," she said. "How absolutely ridiculous. Listeners never hear good of themselves, do they, Major Kerr? This ought to be a lesson to us both, never again to stay too near an open window."

She tried to laugh lightly as she spoke, but the attempt was not a very successful one; then Kerr turned suddenly towards her, and, as her eyes met his, the merriment died out of her face and voice.

"Will you come with me?" he said quietly. "There is something that I wish to say to you."

There was a decided note of authority in his voice and manner, and he led the way to a place that was well out of earshot of the saloon window. Elizabeth followed without a word.

For some moments again they stood in silence, leaning against the rail, with the flashing sky in front of them, and then Kerr began to speak.

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"There is no need, is there?" he said, "for us to think any more about what we have, unfortunately, overheard. The ravings of an angry woman are not of very much consequence to either of us, but, as I said, there is something that I must say to you."

Betty knew perfectly well now what it was that he meant to say, for besides being a beauty she was something of an heiress, and had had many offers of marriage since the day when she had pledged her faith to Jack Feilden, ten years ago. A proposal was no novelty, but why was Kerr, whom she had only known for a few days, speaking to her in this strain?

Could it be possible, she asked herself, that he was acting upon a hasty resolve and desired merely to salve her wounded pride after the cruel stabs which Miss Norton's words had inflicted? Would he dare, for a moment, to offer her such an insult?

Betty drew herself up with a gesture that Gladys Norton might well have described as haughty, and then, as she faced Kerr, her expression changed, for she could read the truth in his grave, steadfast eyes. This man loved her, there could be no doubt about that; she was as certain of it in that moment as she was of her own love for Jack. He was speaking upon no swift impulse of mistaken chivalry, but, instead, was offering her the greatest compliment which a woman can be paid.

He laid his hand gently on hers as it lay on the wooden rail, but she drew it away quickly.

"Major Kerr," she whispered, trying to stop him, but the quiet, earnest voice went on steadily:

"I have only known you for a week, it is true. Perhaps it is presumptuous to speak to you so soon, but I love you, and that must be my excuse."

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Elizabeth interrupted him resolutely then, and she lifted her clear eyes to his face as she spoke. "I should like you to hear my story," she said. "Yes, please, you must let me tell it to you now. Long ago I was engaged to be married, and—and the man that I loved came out here—to Egypt. He disappeared, and we thought that he was dead—drowned. There seemed to be no doubt about it, and I have thought of him as dead—and loved him, for ten years. But, after all, it was a mistake. He was alive, taken prisoner by the Arabs—how, or why, or where, we do not know yet—and kept in captivity by them. They were cruel to him, and—and he is blind. At last, about five weeks ago, we heard that he had escaped. He is at Luxor now, and I am going to him there."

There was a ring of passion in Elizabeth's voice as she concluded, and a wonderful light in her eyes. Kerr listened to her words in silence.

He had not meant to speak to her—yet, but Miss Norton had forced his hand. He had not expected her to care for him—yet, but he had hoped, in time, perhaps, to win her love. And now it was all at an end.

"You may have heard about Mr Feilden's escape," Betty went on. "There was a great deal about it in the English papers, but I begged Rose not to talk about it, and about me, until we reached Luxor. I could not bear to be stared at and looked upon as a curiosity by people that I had never seen before." She laughed, and then held out her hand to Kerr frankly. "Thank you for what you have just said to me, Major Kerr, and for all your kindness since we have been on board this ship."

He took her hand and held it for a moment in his.

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"It is for me to thank you," he said, "for telling me about your engagement. I congratulate you, and I wish you happiness with all my heart."

She left him then, and gathering up her long skirts in one slender hand, moved away gracefully along the deck. The man's blue eyes followed her until she was out of sight.

"There are only a few hours more," Elizabeth whispered to herself, with a happy smile, as she paused, for a moment, outside her cabin, for a last glance at the starry sky. "In less than ten hours I shall see Jack again."

Forward on the deck of the little steamer Kerr was still standing where she had left him. His face was set and stern, and he leaned against the rail with his chin resting on his clenched hands. Everything was quiet on board now, and the vessel was moored for the night, but still he stood there, rigid, silent, and almost as motionless as the watchful Arab sailor who, looking like a monk in his brown hooded coat, crouched on the deck beneath him.

CHAPTER VII

ELIZABETH was up and out on deck very early on the following morning, for the steamer was timed to arrive at Luxor soon after eight o'clock. Her excitement had been far too intense for her to sleep much during the night, and now her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed and her heart beating quickly with eagerness and joyful anticipation.

The scene which greeted her as she opened her cabin door was one of exquisite beauty, and it possessed a delicacy and mystical charm which was quite unfamiliar. Everything was suffused and transformed with the rosy haze of early morning. There was not a breath of wind, and the churning of the steamer's paddles and the rush of water from her bows only seemed to accentuate the unearthly calm and silence.

On the western bank of the river the rocky mountains were glowing with colour in the level rays of the rising sun; they stood back like the encircling walls of a great amphitheatre from the green cultivated land at their feet, while the hills which edged the eastern horizon showed misty and indistinct like a far-away violet cloud.

On the bank near at hand there was a native village, with its huddle of mud houses and squalid heaps of straw and refuse, but this morning everything was beautified and metamorphosed almost beyond recognition in the soft, transfiguring radiance. All the sordid details of the picture were obliterated.

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The graceful palm trees gained a fresh beauty, and the primitive buildings, looming large and mysterious through the mist, looked like the battlemented turrets of some strange mediæval castle—a castle, perhaps, in Spain.

Betty walked forward along the deck and stood motionless, gazing intently towards the south. She felt as if she were approaching Fairyland, and as if the commonplace little steamer were bound for some realm of fancy and enchantment, where the prince, her lover, was waiting to welcome her, and where joy and unspeakable happiness was to be her portion.

In the past few weeks she had so often tried to picture the scene of her arrival in Luxor, that now it seemed to her more like the memory of a past event than the shadowy presentiment of what was yet to come.

Herself and Feilden—she could see the two figures quite distinctly, and yet she did not realise in the least that the man whom she imagined as coming forward to greet her, was not the ten years' captive, nor even the old Jack from whom she had parted in England long ago. No, it was a new personality altogether, stronger and more manly than her boyish lover—the hero, in fact, of her dreams and fancies, and he resembled, in some strange, indefinable way, her new friend, Bertram Kerr.

There was, certainly, a likeness, although not a very strong one, between Kerr and Jack, as the latter had been in the old days, and it is probable that this similarity had had its effect on Elizabeth's mind.

The grim knowledge of Feilden's blindness and sufferings had been, from the first, less a reality to her than a terrible, intangible spectre, and she had not attempted to picture the changes which the ten years

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of misery might have—and, indeed, must have wrought. Instead, she had told herself again and again that the past was over and done with entirely, and that the happiness of the present and the future lay in her own hands.

As the steamer approached nearer to Luxor the passengers began to assemble, and Betty's solitude was invaded. As she moved away, Kerr came towards her along the deck.

She glanced at him dreamily for a moment, for her thoughts were still busy with her own affairs, and then she stopped and held out her hand with a bright smile.

"Good morning," she said, and her greeting was as frank and natural as if the events of the previous evening had been nothing but a vague and already half-forgotten dream.

To tell the truth, the fact of Kerr's proposal, important as such an incident might seem to some women, had had but little effect upon Elizabeth's preoccupied mind, and both it and Miss Norton's vindictive speech had been pushed out of her thoughts by other and far more absorbing considerations.

Bertram Kerr's face was pale this morning beneath the sunburn, and there was an anxious expression in his eyes. He also had passed a sleepless night, and, during his vigil on the deserted deck of the steamer, he had thought over Betty's story and had found that it awakened vague memories in his own mind.

Feilden—Jack Feilden—and Luxor. The remembrance of a tall, stalwart figure and a handsome boyish face came back to him out of the past. He recalled a few quiet days spent in a deserted hotel, a sketch of a flaming sunset, a creaking sakkieh, and a small white dog that had followed him along a dusty pathway.

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All his faint memories and the present facts seemed to be fitting themselves together like the fantastically-shaped pieces of a child's puzzle, and, gradually, the incidents and details of the story took their own places and became one complete and consecutive whole.

He had met and known Feilden in Luxor ten years ago. They had been companions for two or three days, and then he—Kerr—had left for Cairo and India, and Feilden had remained behind.

That was the history, as far as he himself had been concerned, but what of the other? How had he fared in the meantime? What grim sequel had followed those dull, uneventful days?

Bertram Kerr felt a sudden sensation of chill creeping over him as he thought of the ruined life and the wasted years, and he wondered whether Elizabeth realised in the least what the mere fact of an enforced sojourn among the Arabs must have meant to a refined and educated Englishman.

"Poor chap," he muttered to himself, "it's a horrible business altogether, and he had such a loathing for the niggers, as he called them. Ten years! My God! I wonder how he has come through with it, and what he is like now."

He had knocked about the world a good bit himself, he reflected, and he knew a thing or two of natives and native life. As the remembrance of Elizabeth's radiant face and love-lit eyes came back to his mind, he set his teeth and clenched his hands tightly on the wooden rail.

"A horrible, wretched business!" He had repeated the words to himself for the second time, and they flashed back into his mind now, as he came upon Miss Cathcart in the early morning sunlight and

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responded to her friendly greeting. A miserable affair, and one which might lead to endless trouble and disaster, but he could do nothing to help matters, and it was too late now even to speak a word of warning to Rose Brown on her sister-in-law's behalf.

Kerr found that his attention was wandering more than once as he pointed out the sites of the different ruined temples to his companion, and at last, after a minute's silence, he turned to her with a sudden change of voice and manner.

"Do you know, Miss Cathcart, I believe that I met Mr Feilden out here ten years ago. It must have been he. We were both staying at Luxor, and we went for several excursions together."

Betty turned to the speaker eagerly. She had not had much attention to spare for Thebes or Karnak, but the mention of Jack's name aroused her at once from her dreamy reverie.

"You knew Jack? You knew him here in Egypt? Why, that must have been months after I saw him, and he was well, and—but I am forgetting. Of course, it was before—before—and it was ten years ago."

Her voice faltered, and Kerr hastened to reassure her; but, even while the encouraging words were still on his lips, his thoughts were busy with the remembrance of how the years must have dragged, and of how each one must have seemed an eternity when passed amidst the horrors and degradations of the long captivity.

As the steamer drew near to Luxor Kerr left Elizabeth alone, for he could see that she was nervous and preoccupied, but she hardly noticed his departure.

A sudden paroxysm of anxiety had swept over her,

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and her former fears and misgivings had returned with renewed force; but it was only on Feilden's behalf that she was troubled, and she had not a thought to spare for herself, her own welfare, and her own chances of suffering and disillusionment.

Would Jack be disappointed in her? Would she be able to make him happy? Those were the questions which she asked herself again and again, and, as the buildings and brown sun-lit ruins of Luxor swung into sight, her lips trembled and the colour faded out of her face.

The town was quite close now, and everything on shore could be seen distinctly. The hotels with their gardens, the clustered columns of the temple, the mosque, and the rows of shops and white-washed houses. There were crowds of natives and Europeans on the road and landing-place; gaily-dressed children ran hither and thither, and over the whole animated scene there was the yellow glow of early morning and the cloudless sky, against which broad-winged kites wheeled and hovered.

They had really arrived at last. The gangway was down, and people thronged across it from the landing-stage. The deck was crowded, and there was an almost deafening uproar of loud exclamations, merry laughter and the strident clamour of Arab voices.

Elizabeth's courage ebbed away, and she felt lonely and deserted in the midst of the bustle and confusion. She had always expected that Jack would be waiting on the river bank to welcome her, but now everything seemed to be unfamiliar and bewildering, and her eyes could discern no figure which might be his in the seething, hurrying throng on the road and barge.

Her eyes swept the long line of the river front

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again and again, but without result, and the expression of anxiety in her face intensified.

Rose Brown was busy at a little distance with Dot, Nurse, and a pile of luggage, but Kerr was standing near Elizabeth, and he wondered what was amiss, and whether it would be well for him to go forward and offer to help her in her evident distress and perplexity. He had just decided in the affirmative, and was on the point of accosting her, when a fair, thin young man pushed his way through the crowd. The next moment the new-comer touched Betty's arm, and Kerr turned aside again, with a sensation of relief, as he heard the words, "Miss Cathcart, I presume," addressed to her in a clear, precise voice.

Betty started violently, then, as she faced the speaker, she realised that this could be no other than Dr Haynes. Her heart seemed to stop beating, for the quick fear assailed her instantly that he was the bearer of evil tidings. Jack was ill, perhaps, or—or—

Haynes noticed the expression of horror that flashed into the woman's face and her convulsive clutch at the supporting rail. His sharp eyes seemed to read her thoughts at a glance.

"No, there is nothing the matter, my dear lady," he said hurriedly. "My name is Haynes, as perhaps you have guessed already, and I am here to escort you to Mr Feilden. He is still weak, you understand, and I feared that the agitation of coming down to meet you would be too much for him. Will you come now, please? These men will look after your luggage. Mr Feilden is waiting for you in the garden of the hotel."

Elizabeth hardly took in the meaning of this speech, beyond the one fact that Jack was well. Her eyes brightened, as if by magic, and she followed the

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doctor, without a word, down the companion, across the gangway and up the steep, dusty path that led to the road above. They passed through an arched doorway where a tall Soudanese servant stood with a feather brush in his hand, and entered a green, tree-shaded garden, which seemed to be strangely cool and peaceful after the noise and bustle of the street. Betty stopped and glanced round nervously, but Haynes hurried her forward. "Mr Feilden is waiting for us," he said. "This way, please, you will see him in another moment."

Elizabeth followed her guide along a dusky avenue. There were sunk flower-beds on either side of the way, and some of them were flooded with water. The sunlight filtered through the thick canopy of leaves overhead and dappled the smooth path with flickering patches of gold.

She felt as if she were in some strange trance as she made her way through the quivering shadows, and yet, at the same time, her senses were almost unnaturally keen and alert. She noticed and remembered clearly long afterwards every detail and unfamiliar feature of the garden as she saw it then for the first time. The rough, brown stems of the palm trees and their graceful plumes curving against the blue background of the sky, the mauve shadows of plantain leaves on a white-washed wall, the dark-faced gardener bending over his work, and the vivid crimson of hibiscus blossoms, half seen amidst the tangle of rich foliage.

There was a faint ripple of running water to be heard, and the murmur of insects, while the air was full of the cool smell of damp earth, the perfume of roses, and the sharp, wild scent of a flowering mimosa.

"This way, Miss Cathcart," said Haynes, and then

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they turned a corner and skirted a wing of the hotel. The garden broadened out suddenly, there were more palm trees, roses and blossoming shrubs in luxuriant profusion, and a maze of flower-beds intersected by narrow, winding paths.

They made their way down one of these in silence, and, when they paused at last, Elizabeth was almost blinded by the sudden glare of sunlight as they came out from under the thick shadow of the trees. Her dazzled eyes were wide with eager longing, her heart was beating so quickly that she felt as if its throbs would stifle her, and her clasped hands trembled painfully.

For a moment it seemed to her that the open space before them was quite empty; but, as she glanced timidly round, and her eyes grew more accustomed to the vivid light, she noticed a man who was seated on a wooden bench at a little distance. He looked like a very old man, for his shoulders were thin and stooping, and his back was bent. One elbow rested on his knee and his forehead was supported on his clenched hand. The bright sunlight streamed down on to the bowed, silvery head, and there was a curious, indefinable aspect of intense weariness about his whole demeanour and attitude. The hand which was raised to his head, and the other which rested supine on his knee, were strangely sunburnt and wrinkled. A broad-brimmed felt hat lay upon the seat at his side.

Betty's eyes, as they roved about her in feverish expectancy, hardly rested for a moment upon this quiet, stooping figure. She was looking for someone else, someone very different, and she had no time nor attention to spare. Where was he—her lover? Where was Jack?

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She was roused by the touch of Dr Haynes's hand upon her arm, and he led her forward towards the bench.

The man who was seated there raised his head, as if he had suddenly become conscious of their approach, and, as he did so, Elizabeth stopped short in her forward progress and stood, rigid and motionless, her hands pressed convulsively to her heart and her blue eyes wide and staring.

Haynes paused too and glanced in anxious scrutiny at his companion's whitening face, and, at the same moment, the man on the seat rose heavily to his feet and confronted them.

This could not be Jack, it was impossible. Oh, yes, it was quite impossible. The young active Jack Feilden, her lover, who had left her on that December morning ten years ago. The stalwart, light-hearted man whose handsome face, merry smile and gay, brown eyes rose up before her now with such startling vividness, whose ringing voice and cheery laughter seemed still to be sounding in her ears.

The man took a step or two towards them, feeling his way with groping, uncertain hands. He seemed to be even more bent and feeble than before, now that he was standing, and the horror deepened in Elizabeth's face. He came forward and she could see him more and more clearly. Could this be Jack?

It seemed to her at first, in that terrible moment, that there was no trace—no faintest suggestion of a likeness to the lover whom she had lost in this bowed figure that was coming towards her—moving with painful slowness through the flickering patches of sunlight—the sunlight that he could not see.

He was a stranger, an absolute stranger. She had never, surely, in all her life seen him before.

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And yet he was coming forward as if to greet her.

The face was pale and haggard underneath the sunburn, there were deep hollows below the sightless eyes, the wrinkled skin seemed to be stretched tightly over the gaunt jaw and prominent cheekbones. There was something in the expression of the mouth too—it might be, perhaps, caused by the deep lines at the corners of the lips—that was utterly new and unfamiliar.

It could not—no, it could not be he.

She thought that there was a terrible bitterness about the face, a cruelty, almost as if the tortures which he had endured had reflected themselves upon him; a hardness, and yet, at the same time, a weakness that was horrible and indescribable.

This was another man, of course, it must be so, a man whom she had never seen, who had nothing to do with her, or with Jack; she must go on further, beyond the encircling band of trees, and there she would find her lover, the real Jack, waiting to welcome her.

“This is Mr Feilden.” A low voice whispered the words in her ear, and, as she listened, she shrank away with a movement that was entirely involuntary. Her feet did not stir from the spot on which she was standing, but her slender body swayed backwards and an agonised expression of dread and horror passed like a spasm across her face. She stretched out her hands as if to ward off the inexorable approach of the blind man.

Haynes placed his steady hand on her arm. He thought that she was about to drop senseless on to the sandy path, and he could feel, as he touched her, that she was trembling from head to foot.

A brown crested hoopoo ran out from under the

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bushes, and a butterfly flitted past them with the sunlight full on its gaily-coloured wings. From a little distance away there rang out the shrill, merry sound of a child's laughter.

"Be brave, Miss Cathcart; I must beg you to control yourself and be brave."

The quiet, almost inaudible words reached Elizabeth's dulled ears and acted like a charm on her reeling senses. She recovered herself with a great effort and drew her slender figure up proudly to its full height.

She had, it is true, allowed herself to be overcome completely by the first terrible shock of surprise and pain. In her own eyes she was disgraced irretrievably, and in the eyes of the doctor as well, but Jack—and this was Jack, she realised that at last—he did not know—and he must never know—how she had failed him.

In that moment she was conscious of something that was very like joy in the thought of the man's blindness—the infirmity which shielded her, and concealed her pale, horror-stricken face and self-betraying eyes. The truth must be hidden at any cost—she must be brave.

She took a step forward then, and, as the faint rustle of her dress reached his ears, a change came over the face and attitude of the blind man. His outstretched hands seemed to lose their groping movement and held themselves out towards her, a light swept across his wan, upturned face, and for a moment an expression that was vaguely reminiscent of his old self, transfigured the altered features.

"Betty," he cried, "Betty, my darling Betty!"

There was an instant's pause, a hesitation, slight indeed but perceptible, and then Elizabeth came

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forward and took the burnt, wrinkled hands in hers.

“Betty, my love, my darling,” said Feilden again. He clasped her in his arms and pressed his lips passionately to her white cheek.

Haynes, although he had withdrawn for a few steps, and was turning away, so as not to appear to be watching them, could not help noticing that, as Jack kissed her, Betty trembled from head to foot, while the expression of horror and agony came back again into her wide, blue eyes.

And so, in this manner, the lovers met once more, after their ten years’ separation, and, as she stood there, under the palm trees, with Jack’s arms round her, his kisses on her cheeks, and his voice sounding in her ears, Elizabeth realised that her exquisite castles in the air were shattered, that happiness had eluded her grasp once again, and that her bright dreams and hopes, her joyous fancies, her fairyland and her fairy prince, had alike vanished away from her for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

“ You really came up from Cairo on the same boat as Miss Cathcart! The Miss Cathcart! How I envy you. Of course you have made great friends with her, and you will introduce me, won’t you? I am simply dying to know her. We have been here for ages, so I can tell you the whole story from the very beginning. It is all too romantic for words, and, if you like, I will introduce you to poor, dear Mr Feilden.”

It was some little time after the arrival of the Nile steamer, and Miss Norton was comfortably established in a long chair in the hall of the Luxor hotel. She had already discovered a kindred spirit in the shape of a talkative young Australian, who, having been staying in the place for a couple of weeks, considered herself quite an authority upon the affairs and gossip of Luxor, and was only too pleased to impart her knowledge to the new-comer.

One of the first subjects upon which the two girls had embarked was, naturally enough, the strange story of Feilden’s reappearance; and Miss Norton became invested with an added charm and importance when it was known that she had been numbered among the fellow-passengers of the famous Miss Cathcart—the *fiancée*—about whose beauty, character and age there had been innumerable speculations ever since the day when the news of her expected arrival had been received.

Gladys Norton, for her part, was by no means

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delighted to hear that the detested Elizabeth was nothing more nor less than a heroine in disguise, and she did not hesitate to throw unlimited cold water upon her new friend's eulogies, and upon her fervent requests for an introduction.

"Beautiful!—oh, dear, no. Not in my opinion, at least, although perhaps some people might call her pretty. She is far too thin and pasty-faced, and then, of course, she must be quite elderly. Why, if, as you say, she was engaged to this man ten years ago, she must be thirty-three or thirty-four at the very least."

"Oh, no, surely not," the other hastened to intervene. "Dr Haynes told me that she was only seventeen at the time, and he is looking after Mr Feilden, you know, so that he must know all about it."

Miss Norton gave vent to a decidedly dubious sniff.

"Possibly," she remarked drily, "but you say that this Mr Feilden has lost his memory. It is more than likely that his *fiancée's* age is one of the things that he has forgotten. And now"—with a complete change of tone—"please tell me all about Mr Feilden himself. Miss Cathcart kept the whole story quite dark on board ship, and this is the first that I have heard about it."

The Australian was only too ready to comply with this demand, and she launched out into a long and eloquent description of the hero of the romance and of the adventures and experiences which it was supposed had fallen to his lot.

"My dear girl, he is simply too charming for words." The speaker's voice grew shrill with enthusiasm, and she clasped her hands rapturously together. "He is blind, you know, but so cheerful and amusing. I

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have heard all about him from Dr Haynes. It is *nearly two months now since Mr Feilden was found, and for a time he was very ill. Now his memory has gone, and, although he remembers everything that happened before he left England, he has forgotten all about the last ten years and does not remember how he disappeared or anything.* Did you ever hear such an extraordinary story? Dr Haynes says that he is not quite certain whether he has really forgotten, or if it is only that he will not talk about it nor tell anyone what it was that happened. He has awful fits of depression sometimes, poor dear fellow, when he won't speak a word or see anyone, and you know he is still weak and ill. I will introduce you to him as soon as ever I get a chance. We all do our best to cheer him up, and I assure you that he enjoyed himself immensely at a big tea-party that some people gave in the garden the other day."

The girl paused, quite out of breath, and Miss Norton, feeling that she had acquired all the information possible from her companion, leaned back in her chair and glanced round with keen interest at the large, gaily-decorated hall, and at the people who were assembled there.

The episode of Feilden's reappearance, the revival of his strange story, the mystery with which it was still enveloped, and the arrival of the beautiful Miss Cathcart—all these topics for thought and conversation had, as was only natural, proved to be a perfect godsend in the narrow, circumscribed life of the hotel, and now, on this memorable morning, when the heroine of the drama was expected to put in her appearance on the scene, it so happened that the guides and donkeys of Luxor were little in demand, and that quite a number of persons were lounging

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in the verandah or chatting idly together in the hall.

"Everyone is awfully keen to see Miss Cathcart," the Australian girl explained to her companion, "for Mr Feilden has been talking about her and raving about her loveliness for days. They are sure to come in soon now—Mr Feilden always does sit here in the mornings, and—ah, here they come."

The young lady made this last remark in a loud stage whisper, and, as she spoke, books were closed hastily, newspapers rustled, and interested faces glanced up furtively from writing-boards and needlework.

There had been for some time, an air of expectation and surreptitious eagerness about the whole company, and it was evident that everyone was on the alert to obtain a good view of the heroine of the little drama which was being enacted in their midst.

Miss Norton sat upright and hastily adjusted her hat, quite forgetting that it was a blind man upon whom she was preparing to make a good impression, and then there was a murmur of voices, the sound of footsteps on the garden path, and Elizabeth, with Feilden on her arm, and Dr Haynes a little in the background, slowly entered the hotel.

It is needless to say that Betty would have much preferred a less public first appearance, but Jack had insisted upon it that he must, as he expressed it, show her off at once to all his new friends and acquaintances.

"I am very proud of you, darling," he had said, "and I have been telling everyone here all about you. There are some jolly nice people in the hotel, and they are as keen as possible to see you. Come along Betty, old girl, I told them to be on the look-

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out for you, and they will be getting impatient if we keep them waiting any longer."

A painful cough interrupted his last words, but he changed it into a laugh, and, getting up from the bench where they had been sitting, took Betty's proffered arm.

"Come along," he said again, "you will find that we are quite celebrities here, and the whole crowd are dying to be introduced to you."

Elizabeth winced, as she had winced more than once already during the course of this her first interview with her long-lost lover.

There was something that was almost ghastly in the contrast between the man's appearance and the boyish gaiety of his words and manner. The silvery hair and lined, haggard face might have belonged to a centenarian, and there were strange hollow cadences in his voice, as if it had been worn out with disuse and weariness.

Dr Haynes, who after bringing Elizabeth to Feilden had retired to a little distance from the pair, now came forward again, and they started off slowly in the direction of the hotel.

To a woman of Betty's sensitive nature the mere idea of this dramatic entry upon the scene of her new life could not fail to be almost unbearably vulgar and degrading, but Jack would not listen to her demurs, and he dismissed all her objections with something of his old high-handed boisterousness.

It had been a well-known fact in old days that he hated to be opposed or contradicted, and, during the halcyon months of their brief engagement, the young girl had given way to her headstrong lover in everything. Now she submitted to his wishes with the feeling that nothing mattered any longer and

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that one humiliation or discomfiture more or less could make but little difference.

When they entered the hotel a few minutes later Gladys Norton decided in her own mind that she had never seen Miss Cathcart look more stuck-up and haughty, while Rose Brown, whose loving, anxious eyes seemed to read the truth at a glance, realised that Betty's dreams of happiness were at an end, and that her love-story was in dire peril of being changed into a tragedy once again.

Late that afternoon, when the long, eventful day was, at last, drawing to a close, Elizabeth found herself alone, and, making her way to the garden, she paced with slow, weary steps up and down the shady avenue.

She had managed, somehow, to live through it all, with a whirling brain, it is true, and a heavy heart, but with a smile upon her stiff lips, and with her habitual composure almost as unruffled—outwardly—as usual.

The introductions to a number—seemingly an infinite number—of kindly but inquisitive strangers, the welcomes and handshakes, the curious glances, which she had noticed, and the whispers which she had inadvertently overheard—she had endured it all without one sign of flinching or one word of complaint.

She had even managed, and this had been very difficult, to smile bravely through the long luncheon, at which healths had been drunk, speeches made and congratulations offered, and to which the elaborate floral decorations of the table had imparted a semi-bridal air of festivity and rejoicing.

Jack Feilden had been all the time in the highest possible spirits, and, as she listened to his gay jests

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and frequent allusions to old days and old happenings, she had felt, that had she closed her eyes for a moment, it would have been easy to imagine that the ten years were a dream, and that they were back again in the oak-panelled dining-room at the Manor House.

Rose Brown could share these memories with Betty, and she thought of a big dinner-party, a farewell entertainment, which had been given on the eve of the young man's departure for Egypt.

It had been December then, and now it was December again, but in the place of the shaded lamps sunshine was streaming in at the tall windows, and the table was decked with summer flowers instead of with holly berries and russet chrysanthemums.

What a gallant figure the hero of the evening had presented on that memorable occasion, and how clearly his voice had rung out as he made his boyish speech and proposed the health of his future wife.

Rose felt as if she should break down altogether, and disgrace herself by a peal of hysterical laughter, when Feilden got up painfully to his feet, and, with the dazzling sunlight full on his sightless face, held up his glass and bade them drink to Elizabeth's health and happiness.

Health and happiness. The very words themselves seemed to be replete with ghastly mockery as one glanced from the man, whose whole aspect bore the evidences of suffering and cruel hardships, to the pale, rigid face of the woman at his side.

It had come to an end at last, as everything must needs come to an end, and, although Jack had insisted upon an adjournment to the hall for coffee and cigarettes, even this further ordeal did not last for ever. When Dr Haynes asserted his authority and

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carried his patient off for a siesta, Elizabeth seized the opportunity for escape and hurried away alone to the deserted garden.

She felt that she must be by herself, at all costs, even if it were only for a few minutes, and free to face the terrible and totally-unexpected situation with which she found herself confronted.

The stiff lines of her face relaxed a little as she paced up and down beneath the trees, but the expression of dread and anguish deepened and intensified in her eyes. It was as if all the joy and buoyancy which had been awakened in her by the arrival of Feilden's first letter, had been suddenly obliterated. She had become, once more, the grave, pale Miss Cathcart of the last ten years, but now, instead of the dull apathy of loneliness and past sorrow, there was present suffering and keen, alert fear and misery in her beautiful face.

It was, indeed, an overwhelming blow which had descended upon her, and the situation was an almost impossible one. As she looked ahead at the trials and difficulties which awaited her in the future, and from which, at present, she could see no way of escape, Elizabeth wished, with a dull, hopeless feeling of utter weariness, that she could awaken to find that all the events and emotions of the past two months had been nothing but a vivid dream, and that she was back again once more in the dreary security of the Dower House.

She no longer loved Jack Feilden. That was the bald, unvarnished truth, the long and the short of the whole matter. The ten years' fidelity went for nothing, and the steadfast, fervent affection that had lasted for so long had melted away completely. The strong ramparts of her love, behind which her broken

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heart had sheltered itself through all those lonely years, had fallen now, just when they had seemed to be more firm and impregnable than ever. At the first sight of that bowed figure and altered face they had tottered and trembled, and then had come crashing down in ruins when the lips of her long-lost lover touched her cheek.

She was stunned and bewildered by the force and completeness of the catastrophe, but she did not question its reality for a moment. There could be no doubt, no possibility of mistake.

Her love was dead, gone, vanished, as entirely as if it had never existed, and the woman's face flamed suddenly and her eyes filled with smarting tears, as she remembered how she had despised Rose Brown, long ago, for what she had considered her forgetfulness and faithlessness to the dead, and how she had prided herself upon the eternity and invincibility of her own love.

Never before, in the whole course of her life, had Elizabeth felt so hateful to herself as now, when she realised that her devotion to Feilden had not been able to survive the first momentary shock of disillusionment and disappointment.

It is true that her dreams and fanciful pictures of the expected meeting with her betrothed had been cruelly unlike the reality, but had not those very dreams themselves been impossible and ridiculous in the extreme?

What sensible woman would ever have deluded herself with such absurdities, for how could the heroic figure of her imaginations ever have emerged unscathed from the terrible ordeal of the long exile?

Betty reproached herself relentlessly, as these thoughts, and others like them, passed in weary

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procession through her brain, and she told herself again and again that she—and she only—had been to blame.

Jack was changed in appearance, of course, how could it be otherwise? But, in everything else, was not he almost startlingly unaltered? He loved her with his old ardour and impetuosity, his manner and his modes of speech were the same as they had been in the old days, and even the well-remembered epithets and the boyish jests, at which they had once laughed together, were still on his lips.

Surely then, if it were only his outward aspect that had altered, her own love and worship could not be dead, for was it not unbelievable that a devotion which had lasted through so many years could be destroyed in a moment, by one glimpse of a haggard face and a prematurely silvered head, and ought she not only to love him the more as she realised the sufferings which he had endured?

Again and again did Elizabeth repeat these arguments to herself, again and again did she go over the same ground, but it was only to find that she could not retrace her steps nor bring herself back to the old point of view.

Nothing remained of the old glamour, not a spark of the old fervour survived, and, as she remembered that she was still this man's affianced wife, the flood seemed to ebb slowly away from her heart, and a long, involuntary shudder shook her from head to foot.

It was beginning to grow a little dusky in the garden before Betty's solitude was invaded, and then the slight, upright figure of Dr Haynes appeared, coming towards her along the cool, shady avenue.

Haynes was, by nature, a clever and astute young

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man, and he had understood a good deal of what was passing through Miss Cathcart's mind when she first recognised Feilden, and during the strange luncheon party which had followed that meeting.

He realised that the whole affair had been a shock from which she had not yet begun to recover, but, although he was, as a rule, kindly and considerate enough, he had, just now, but little thought to spare for Elizabeth and her interests.

His patient and his patient's welfare were of supreme importance in his eyes, and it was, therefore, entirely on Feilden's behalf that he now sought out Betty, for he was anxious to ascertain both her present attitude and her intentions for the future.

Haynes had happened to be the only European doctor in Luxor at the time of Jack's reappearance, and he had had, moreover, the good fortune to be, himself, the person to discover and establish the identity of the long-lost Englishman.

It was only natural, under these circumstances, that the young doctor should look upon Feilden as his special charge, and he was now absorbed, almost to the exclusion of any other interest, in his patient's mysterious history, loss of memory, and possible chances of recovery.

Almost from the first Haynes had built his hopes on the beneficial results of Elizabeth's arrival, and, having written to her at Jack's dictation, read her replies, and listened to endless eulogies on the subjects of her charms and virtues, he had a very fair knowledge of the expected heroine, her character, history and attraction.

There had been, it is true, some slight misgivings in his mind when he went down to the steamer, but these had been dispelled by Betty's beauty and

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youthful appearance, and it was not until he had seen the look of horror on her face, when she first caught sight of the blind man, that he realised that, after all, his plans and hopes might be doomed to failure.

Miss Cathcart had come out to Egypt as Feilden's promised wife, but what if she should refuse to accept the allotted rôle? Clearly it would be advisable for him to interview the young lady at once, point out her proper course, and warn her of the consequences which might follow her failure to comply with his demands.

The doctor's face was very serious when he confronted Elizabeth, and he plunged into his subject without a moment's delay.

"I wish to have a little conversation with you, Miss Cathcart, upon a matter of the utmost importance."

Betty had tried to force her lips into a smile of welcome, but her face grew grave again as she listened.

"You must pardon what you may think an unwarrantable impertinence, my dear lady," Haynes went on—he was fond of long words, and this seemed an admirable occasion for their employment—"but I am Mr Feilden's medical attendant, and I am addressing you on his behalf."

"Certainly," said Betty, and the other continued more quickly, as his nervousness subsided and he began to warm to the interest of his subject.

"You will have gathered from my letters that the patient is still very far from strong. Indeed, I may say that his condition is decidedly serious, and it is absolutely necessary to keep him from any chance of worry or anxiety. He—he has been looking forward to your arrival with the greatest eagerness, and in

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this stage of his recovery nothing could be worse for him than disappointment."

Elizabeth's white face grew, suddenly, a shade whiter than it had been before, but she said nothing.

"When you first saw him I could not help noticing that you were terribly shocked and upset," the other went on hurriedly. "No doubt he is much altered, and—well, I suppose you find that this makes a difference in your feelings. It was only to be expected, but after the letters you have written—I had to read them, you see—it—it will be a bit rough on the poor fellow to find that you have changed your mind."

Haynes was finding this conversation far more difficult than he had anticipated, and his cherished professional manner deserted him suddenly. Elizabeth had drawn herself up to her full height and her blue eyes were fixed proudly upon his face.

It was, she felt, indeed an unwarrantable impertinence that an absolute stranger should dare to intrude thus into her most private affairs. To a woman of her temperament the situation was well-nigh unbearable, and she was on the point of bringing the interview to an end with a few short words of dismissal, when she remembered that she was not in a position to do anything of the sort. This man had been a witness to her defeat and humiliation. He had seen her failure at the critical moment, and he had an undoubted right, therefore, to question her and dictate to her.

Her eyes fell and a transitory flame of brilliant colour swept across her face.

"What is it that you want me to do?" she asked quietly. "You must explain to me, please, what would be best for Mr Feilden."

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Haynes drew a long breath of relief. A moment ago, when her eyes had flashed upon him so defiantly, he had, by no means expected that Miss Cathcart would meekly comply with his demands. If she were willing to listen to advice and to obey orders with regard to his patient, all would yet be well; and, with his self-possession now quite restored, he launched out into a long account of Feilden's illness, his strange loss of memory, and the necessity for his having, as far as possible, his own way in everything.

"We must make him happy, Miss Cathcart—happy and contented; and, above all, we must never refer in any way to the occurrences of the last ten years. He never says anything about what happened, and we do not know yet if he cannot, or if it is that he *will* not, remember. At present the great thing is to get his strength back again. His constitution is, of course, terribly weakened, but I have real hopes of his ultimate recovery. It is half the battle to keep him in good spirits, and I must beg you to be as cheerful and animated as possible when you are with him."

He paused, but the listener's eyes were still fixed anxiously on his face.

Was she only to be cheerful and animated? Was there nothing else required of her? She shivered as she remembered the frequent allusions to an immediate marriage which had been contained in Jack's first letters from Luxor. Was it still intended that this programme should be carried out?

Haynes, by whose hand those letters had been written, understood and answered the question in her face. He turned away a little and scraped a hole in the sandy path with his stick.

"Feilden had all sorts of plans at first," he said;

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“ but now his idea seems to be to treat the last ten years as if they were ten days, and to let everything be arranged as it was before he came to Egypt. He gets very confidential with me, you understand, at times, and he has told me that you have promised to marry him before long. He talks about a wedding in May, when the hawthorns are in blossom, and all that, and a honeymoon in Devonshire. He will have to stay out here for some months, but I should think that he could get back to England about April. In the meantime we must let him make his plans, and, as I said before, keep him happy and amused.”

It was Elizabeth's turn now to feel relieved, and, although her outlook was still dreary enough, she felt as if a great weight had been lifted suddenly from her mind. It was only the beginning of December now. There was to be a respite for her. May was a very long way off. Her voice and manner regained something of their habitual composure and quiet dignity as she questioned Dr Haynes and listened to his explanations and comments.

Nothing further had, it appeared, been ascertained as to the facts of Feilden's ten years' captivity, and the mysteries as to how and where it had been spent were still unsolved. Although all possible inquiries were being made by the authorities, no fresh discoveries had been made, and the difficulties of the case were increased a thousandfold by the unwillingness—or the inability—of Feilden himself to throw any light upon the affair.

There were innumerable stories afloat, but they all remained mere rumours and conjectures. The natives of the district could, apparently, give no information, and the only point upon which there remained neither doubt nor dispute was this,

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that the captive had been treated with the utmost inhumanity, and that besides the loss of his eyesight Feilden's strength and health had broken down completely under the strain of the prolonged misery.

Haynes, in replying to Betty's searching questions, touched as lightly as he could upon the details of Jack's sufferings, but her clear eyes seemed almost to be able to read his thoughts, and, as she listened, the pathos of the ruined life appealed to her with irresistible force.

It was all the more terrible and pitiful to her now that she had no longer the remedy of her great love to offer to the injured man as a recompense for the sorrows and tortures that had been inflicted upon him.

He seemed to stand alone, a bent, weary figure, cut off from all hopes of happiness and success, with sightless eyes and groping hands stretched out beseechingly towards her. With those long five months intervening between the first of December and the first of May, Elizabeth did not pause to remember her own feelings and her own fears. A sudden rush of pity welled up into her heart and she resolved that, come what might, Jack should not be disappointed.

All the generosity and unselfishness of her nature was awake and alert, and the bitter sense of humiliation and failure only served to accentuate the depth and intensity of her enthusiasm.

If she could not give Jack love, she could, at least, offer him absolute devotion and life-long service; she could sacrifice everything for his sake, and, as his wife, think of nothing but his welfare and his happiness.

Betty welcomed this new idea eagerly, and the very thought of the long martyrdom which it might

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entail, only made it appear the more desirable; for, in her present mood, oppressed as she still was with the sensation of guilt and faithlessness, she was ready to accept any trial or to embark upon any career of self-abnegation and sacrifice.

When Haynes suggested, at last, that she should go to Jack Feilden, who was anxious to see her again, she agreed willingly, and there was a new light in her eyes and a new earnestness in her face, as she followed the young man through the garden and back to the hotel.

It was very quiet and peaceful in the little sitting-room to which Haynes led Elizabeth. "Here is Miss Cathcart," he said, as he held the door open for her to pass in, and then he closed it softly and went away.

Feilden was sitting by the window in a large arm-chair banked up with cushions. His face was turned towards the crimson sunset sky. Elizabeth paused for a moment on the threshold, then she slowly crossed the room and seated herself in a low chair at the blind man's side.

He roused himself and moved slightly as the rustle of her dress fell upon his ear. "Is that you, Betty?" he said, stretching out his hand, and she laid her cool, soft fingers in his.

Feilden's mood had changed completely now, and he was quiet, gentle and subdued. All the boisterousness that had been such a mockery of his old cheerfulness had disappeared.

There were tender notes in his low, weary voice, and he spoke of old days and of old friends. The present and the future seemed to be alike forgotten. He was back again in the past, and, as the dusk gathered and the glow faded slowly out of the sky,

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the changed, haggard face could only be seen dimly in the uncertain light.

Surely, Elizabeth told herself, he was not so much altered after all, and then she went on to wonder whether she had, perhaps, been foolish and premature in deciding that her old love was dead.

It might be a mistake, and, as her thoughts veered round again, the future began to seem less dark and hopeless, and her hand returned, softly and shyly, the pressure of the thin, sunburnt fingers.

She was tired out, completely exhausted indeed, with all the events and emotions of the day that was drawing to an end. The sufferings and disappointments of a lifetime seemed to have been crammed into the few short hours that had elapsed since her arrival in Luxor, and it was difficult to realise that only yesterday she had been on board the Nile steamer with nothing but the trivial annoyances of Miss Norton's jealousy and insolence to mar her happiness.

How long ago it all seemed now—how far away and remote from her present life. She was so utterly weary that she hardly regretted the fervent joy and bright hopes that had been hers, but, as she sat there and listened while Jack talked of her father and of her brother George, of the summer day when they had first met, and of the winter morning when he had bidden her farewell, she began to feel as if the real Jack had come back at last, and as if the old life and the old love might be hers even yet.

"Come a little nearer to me, dearest," Feilden said, breaking a long silence. "I have learnt a blind man's trick or two, although I can't see your pretty, pink cheeks and blue eyes."

She bent towards him, and he raised his hands and

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passed them gently across her face, tracing out, as it were, each well-remembered feature. If the lines were sharper and the soft curves of brow and chin a trifle less rounded, Jack did not notice the difference, and his fingers could not tell that the fair hair was not so golden nor the cheeks so rosy as they had been in the old days.

Betty felt strange thrills of emotion run through her at the touch of his hands on her face, and she told herself again that she had been mistaken, and that she loved Jack as much—nay, perhaps, even more than ever before.

Of course she loved him, when he had endured such bitter sufferings, when he had been parted from friends and home and country for all those wretched years, and deprived so ruthlessly of everything that makes life pleasant and desirable. She had heard that day of blows and savage cruelty, of starvation, and of ropes which had cut their way into the flesh of wrists and ankles. Of course she loved him, and, as she recalled the doctor's words and hints, it seemed to her impossible that she could ever have really doubted the fact for a single moment. Of course she loved him.

With a little sob she caught the scarred hands in her own and pressed them to her lips, while a passion of pity and tenderness stirred her heart.

Pity is akin to love—so the old proverb says—but it seemed to Elizabeth then that it was not only akin to love, but identical with it, and that the two words were but different names for the same emotion.

She lifted her bowed head, and the blind man stooped forward and gently kissed her lips.

About an hour later, Betty, already dressed for the

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evening, came slowly down the staircase from her room. She was in search of Rose, for she had not yet had more than a few hurried words with her sister-in-law, and she felt that her absorption in her own affairs and her own troubles had made her selfishly preoccupied and unsympathetic.

She stopped for a moment when she reached the hall, uncertain which way to turn, and then crossed over to the drawing-room, whence she was attracted by the sound of voices and of loud, merry laughter. The door was ajar. She pushed it open quickly, and then paused and stood on the threshold with a growing amazement and disgust in her eyes.

There were only three people in the room—Jack Feilden, Gladys Norton and the Australian girl, Miss White. The promised introduction had already been effected, and the trio were, apparently, upon the best and most confidential terms.

Miss White had offered to describe the newcomer to the blind man, but he had refused, declaring that his fingers were as good as anybody else's eyes, and that, if Miss Norton would permit him, he could read her face with the greatest possible ease.

"I'm learning all the little ways of the trade," he had told them with a laugh, "and I'm only waiting till I get back to England to buy a Bible with raised letters and a dog to lead me about on a string."

The fair Gladys had had no objections whatever to complying with Mr Feilden's request. She knelt down before him, in much the same attitude as that in which Elizabeth had knelt barely an hour before, and screamed with laughter as he passed his hands over her glowing cheeks and elaborate waves of dark hair.

Miss White, meanwhile, who was sitting on the

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other side of Feilden, offered him advice, and corrected his guesses as to the colouring of the eyes, complexion and hair of her new friend.

The three were in this position when Elizabeth opened the door of the room, but Miss Norton was the only one who noticed her. She happened to glance up, as Jack's hands were straying over her forehead, and, as her eyes met those of Betty, a triumphant smile of malice curved her lips. "Conceited, stuck-up thing," she said to herself. "She's just as jealous as ever she can be." Then, as the other woman softly closed the door and disappeared, she burst into a noisy peal of laughter.

Elizabeth did not pursue her search for Rose any further. Instead, she crossed the hall again and remounted the staircase, with her head held up proudly and with a burning flush of shame dyeing her face.

For the moment her pity was as dead as her love, and she was conscious of nothing but contempt for the man who once had possessed her whole heart.

The vulgar little scene to which she had just been a witness was, it seemed to her, the last straw that made her burden an insupportable one.

It was all horrible and degrading. The episode in the twilight, when her lover's hands had moved over her face, had meant so much to her, and now it was all spoilt and made worthless and ridiculous. A display of cheap sentiment—that was all it had been—and Betty smiled scornfully as she remembered that Jack had always had a touch of sentimentalism in his composition.

Surely she need no longer consider herself bound by either her old vows or newly-made decision. It

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would be absurd to sacrifice everything for a man who was capable of thus humiliating her.

She did not pause to remember that Feilden had been quite unconscious of her presence, but, even if she had thought of this, it would by no means have exonerated him in her eyes.

As the memory of Gladys's flushed, vivacious face came back to her mind, held up, as she had last seen it, for the inspection of the blind man's groping fingers, Elizabeth felt that something very like a sacrilege had been committed, and the sense of horror and repulsion which she had experienced earlier in the day, swept over her again with redoubled force.

She made her way wearily up to her own room, and, when she had reached it, she closed the door and locked it with quiet deliberation. Then she crossed over to the open window, and, seating herself, buried her shamed, burning face in her hands.

It was quite dark now. The last faint rosy tinge of the after-glow had faded out of the sky. The stars were beginning to shine brightly above the palm trees. An owl hooted in the distance, and the cries of the dogs could be heard from the villages beyond the fields.

CHAPTER IX

MORE than a week passed away. The interest and excitement which had been aroused in the hotel by Elizabeth's arrival began to subside, while even the strange story and mysterious adventures of Feilden himself ceased to be the principal topics of conversation.

It was now nearly mid-December. The season was advancing. There were many new tourists in Luxor, and many amusements and excursions to be considered and arranged.

Among other interests a particularly elaborate tomb had lately been excavated in Thebes, a gymkhana was under discussion, and the idea of a fancy-dress ball had been mooted.

It was only to be expected that, by the side of these absorbing novelties, Jack Feilden and his *fiancée* should be ousted from their places as supreme attractions; and, besides, nothing further had been discovered as to the experiences of the unfortunate man during the period of his ten years' captivity. He, himself, still either could not—or would not—throw any light upon the subject, and it is impossible for even the most ardent and inveterate of gossips to continue, for more than a week or two in succession, to go over and over again the same old ground of comment and conjecture.

The actors in the little drama, meanwhile, settled

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down quietly into the performance of their allotted rôles.

Poor Feilden's daily life was, perforce, of a monotonous and semi-invalidish description, although he rebelled bitterly against the many restrictions imposed upon him by his blindness and weak state of health, and insisted, with a pathetic eagerness, upon sharing, as far as was possible, in the amusements and occupations of the other inhabitants of the hotel.

As for Elizabeth, she accepted, apparently without demur, the position which she had journeyed out from England to fill, and played the part of the loving and dutiful *fiancée* to perfection.

By this time she had, in a measure, recovered from the shock of the first meeting, and, having reviewed matters calmly, had abandoned any ideas of open rebellion or escape.

She did not love Jack any longer. After the first evening she had never found it possible to deceive herself on that point again, although she tried earnestly to re-awaken the old affection, and never ceased to reproach herself with her disloyalty to the man who had been, for so long, her hero and her idol.

At times, indeed, she grew quite morbid on the subject, and would tell herself bitterly that she must be unnaturally shallow-hearted and fickle. In all the many stories which she had heard and read of divided lovers, even if the man had proved faithless, the woman had invariably remained steadfast to the end. There had been Mariana in the moated grange, Elaine watching over the shield of Lancelot, and the little Saracen maiden with her crusader, Gilbert. Had it not always been the same? And now she herself, Elizabeth Cathcart, who had taken an innocent pride in her long fidelity, was destined,

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in her own person, to give the lie to the old romantic legends.

The pity of it all was that poor Jack Feilden loved her still, as devotedly as ever, and it was impossible to doubt this fact for a moment, although, with an exaggeration of his old gallantry, he openly expressed admiration for several young ladies in the hotel, and had embarked upon an animated flirtation with Gladys Norton.

Betty observed the progress of this little interlude with mingled scorn and pity, for it was easy to see that, while the girl was deliberately trying to awaken her jealousy, to Jack the affair was nothing but a passing amusement, and his old love retained her place in his heart and thoughts.

Elizabeth tried to appear cheerful and happy in those days, for she was determined that no one should guess the truth, but although her voice was gay and her laugh almost as frequent as ever, those who knew her best were not entirely deceived. Old Nurse's shrewd dark eyes often followed her mistress about anxiously, while as for Rose Brown, she had suspected from the day of their arrival at Luxor that there was something seriously amiss.

There was not very much that could be done for Feilden, for he was still too weak to exert himself in any way, but Betty threw herself into her career of self-sacrifice with a perfect passion of fervour and devotion. When Jack tired of Miss Norton's society, she would sit with him for hours, listening to his memories of old days and his confident plans for the future, or she would read to him, until her voice grew hoarse and threatened to give way under the strain.

No task could have seemed too hard for her then, no ordeal too distasteful. She blamed herself

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bitterly for her failure to return Jack's affection, and would have welcomed any fatigue or trial, but, all the time, could she have realised the truth, the explanation of the change in her feelings was a very natural one, and it was fate, and not any defect in her own character, that was to blame.

She told herself, remorsefully, again and again, that Jack had not changed, and in this she was, to a certain extent, right, for the man's development had been so stunted and arrested by the long years of misery and hardship, that he was still the same being, careless, self-willed and irresponsible—a boy almost in mind and feelings—that he had been on that snowy December morning when he left the Manor House; while as for Elizabeth, the ten years' interval had had exactly the opposite effect upon her intellect and character, so that she was now immeasurably the superior of the man to whom she was betrothed.

The very depth and sincerity of the grief with which she had mourned for Feilden's supposed death, had only served to increase this superiority and to widen the breach between them, and it was now impossible that she should not perceive, even in the first moment of their re-union, how very far poor Jack fell short of the perfect and heroic figure that she had set up in her own mind.

And besides this Feilden's character had deteriorated in many ways, for, while the growth and development of his good qualities had been stunted, his faults and defects seemed to have increased and become accentuated.

Where he had before been merely self-willed and indolent, he was now obstinate and selfish in the extreme; where he had been fond of variety and

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novelty he was foolishly weak and vacillating, while the youthful cheeriness and gaiety that had been so attractive, had turned into a rough boisterousness that at times coarsened into positive vulgarity.

These defects and weaknesses, as was only natural, jarred upon Betty's sensitive mind, although she tried to persuade herself that they were merely superficial and transitory; but there were other changes, apart from these comparatively insignificant ones, that caused her real anxiety and foreboding.

It seemed to her sometimes that an entirely unsuspected side of Feilden's character had developed itself, fostered, as it were, by the sufferings which he had endured, and as if, in the occasional glimpses which she caught of this new nature, dark depths of misery and cruelty unfolded themselves before her horrified eyes.

When he was plunged into one of the terrible fits of melancholy to which he was subject, he seemed like a complete stranger, with nothing remaining of the old good-humoured Jack Feilden about him, and, even at other times, there would come an occasional flicker, as if of latent cunning and malice, into the worn, haggard face.

One day he kicked aside a little pariah puppy that had stumbled across his path, and there was something that was fiercely brutal in the action, while, on another occasion, Betty shuddered involuntarily as she noticed the expression which disfigured his features, when a native child, with his whining demand for baksheesh, touched his arm.

It was this latter incident, unimportant enough in itself, it is true, which served more than anything else to open Elizabeth's eyes to the new side of

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Feilden's nature, and it showed her, besides, the loathing in which he held the Arabs and everything that was in any way connected with them.

As a general rule the natives did not molest the blind man, and indeed appeared to avoid him, while for his part he rarely betrayed, either by word or sign, that he was cognisant of their existence, and, although it was practically impossible that he should not have learnt the language of his captors, no word of Arabic had ever been heard to pass his lips.

When on this particular occasion Elizabeth saw the absolute horror and repulsion with which he recoiled from the mere touch of the child's outstretched hand, she remembered suddenly how Major Kerr had spoken about a friend of his, who, for no apparent reason, loathed and shrunk from the natives, and she wondered, for the first time, whether this friend might not have been Jack himself.

It was a warm and beautiful evening when the incident occurred, and the three, Feilden, Haynes and Elizabeth, were sauntering along the broad, open road that lies in front of the Luxor temple.

There had been a high wind in the earlier part of the day, but it had died away towards sunset, and now the hills on the western side of the river, that had been shrouded with drifting sand clouds, were clear and beautiful again once more. Their crags and precipices, the tombs with which they are honey-combed, and the great ruined temples on the plain beneath them, could be seen distinctly.

In front of the low wall, on the opposite side of the road, there were a number of little stalls decked out with strings of gaily-coloured beads, chaplets of roughly-cut cornelians, quaint weapons, bags made

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of dyed leather, and any number of real or spurious antiquities.

Some Arab boys in their blue garments, with white twisted turbans on their heads, were in charge of the stalls. One of them held out three or four turquoise-hued scarabs on the palm of his hand towards Betty as she passed. Another of the boys had a dozen or more of the long bead chains, which he was offering for sale, hung round his brown neck.

The late sunshine glinted brightly on the children's white teeth and sparkling eyes, on the crude, gaudy colours of their exposed wares, and on the columns of the great temple which towered in the background.

"Come, lady! See here, very good scarab. No charge for looking," clamoured the boys in noisy chorus; but Elizabeth only shook her head, with an amused smile, in answer to their vociferous and insistent demands and invitations.

She had taken this same walk so often during the past week, it was, indeed, part of their daily routine, and she was fast becoming accustomed to the manner in which Jack feigned to be oblivious to the busy native life around him, and deaf to the sounds and voices which met his ears on every side.

So far nothing in the least disturbing had ever occurred, and, therefore, Betty was all the more horrified and amazed, when the beggar ran across the road and touched the blind man's arm, to see the menacing gesture with which he turned upon the little offender and the expression of rage, almost bordering upon ferocity, which swept across his sightless face.

The child—it was a boy of four or five years old—cowered away, terrified into silence by the convulsed features and raised, threatening hand, but Dr Haynes, who was walking on the other side of Feilden, inter-

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posed hastily, and, drawing him away, dismissed him with the desired baksheesh, and with a consolatory pat on the dark, close-cropped head.

The whole affair was over in a moment, and the natives in the neighbourhood had not even noticed that anything was amiss, but Elizabeth could see that Jack's face was still painfully agitated, and that the hand which rested on her arm trembled violently.

Her one idea was to divert his thoughts from the incident which had so much disturbed him, and, with this object in view, and with the thought of Kerr still in her mind, she remembered the conversation on that last morning of the Nile voyage, when Kerr had told her how he had met and known Feilden in the old days.

"By the way, Jack," she said, "I do not believe that I have ever told you, have I? That I met a friend of yours on the steamer coming up the river. His name was Kerr—Major Kerr—and he said that he knew you here, ten years ago. It must have been when you first came out from England. How foolish of me never to have thought to ask you about it before."

Had Betty had any idea of the close connection which existed between Kerr and the secret of Jack's disappearance, she would never have mentioned his name, and would, indeed, have done everything in her power to keep the two men apart, for one of the most often repeated of Dr Haynes's commands was that—at present—nothing should be said or done which might serve to bring the events of the ten years' captivity back to his patient's mind.

It was, however, impossible for her to guess at the truth, and, as Jack had shown himself ready and willing to discuss and describe the details of his visit to Luxor—previous to his disappearance—it never

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occurred to her that the subject of his friendship with Kerr might be one to be avoided.

No harm, however, appeared to be done. Feilden had only pleasant associations with Bertram Kerr, and he remembered him perfectly when he was thus recalled to his mind. Even if he realised that he had seen the man last within a few hours of his terrible adventure on the river bank, he did not in any way connect him with that experience, nor with the long, ghastly years which had been its sequel.

"Kerr"—he repeated the name eagerly—"why, yes, of course, I remember him as well as possible; a jolly good fellow he was, and we were great pals. Rum thing, by Jove, that he should have been on that boat with you. Is he coming to Luxor, Betty? It would be a perfect godsend to have a fellow like that to talk to."

Feilden was capricious, as invalids so often are, and was beginning to weary of the constant companionship of Haynes. Besides this he was of a most sociable disposition, and new friends and new faces had always had for him an irresistible attraction.

He questioned Betty closely, during their short walk back to the hotel, as to her introduction to Kerr at Port Said, his connection with George Cathcart in India, and the incidents and details of the voyage from Cairo.

The blind man's own former acquaintanceship with Kerr had been neither a very long nor a very close one—indeed it had been, to tell the truth, rather a one-sided affair—but now, looking back upon it, across the dark chasm of the lost years, it seemed to him that it had been quite an important factor in his life.

Anybody listening to Jack's descriptions and re-

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miniscences, and having no knowledge of the true facts, would have imagined that the two men had been intimate friends, instead of mere casual comrades, during a few uneventful days.

"No, he wasn't here long, but we saw no end of each other, I can tell you. Clever chap he was. Fond of reading, and all that sort of thing. I expect you two were as thick as thieves on that Nile boat. He was a quiet fellow, I remember, not much of a lady's man, but you would be just the girl that he would take a fancy to."

Elizabeth said nothing in reply to this speech, but she could not help being glad that Jack's blindness prevented him from seeing the blush that stained her cheeks, as she remembered what a very decided fancy Major Kerr had taken to her, during the week that they had spent together on board the Nile steamer.

"You say he went to Aswàn," Feilden continued. "He'd much better have come here. I say, Betty, why shouldn't you write and suggest it to him? It would do me all the good in the world, I must say, to have a chap like that to talk to."

"Why, Jack, surely you're not tired of me already?" Betty cried, with a little laugh; but, although she did not comply with Jack's request, Major Kerr was, nevertheless, destined to occupy an important place in her thoughts during the next few days.

Feilden talked of him incessantly, and racked his brain in attempts to recall all the details of their short acquaintanceship. "Kerr did this, Kerr said that," the words were for ever on his lips, and, every time that he uttered them, the picture of the man's sunburnt face and blue eyes seemed

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to return, with strange vividness, to the listener's mind.

During the days which they had spent together on the river, the strength and power of Kerr's character and personality had made a deep impression upon Elizabeth's mind, and she was surprised now to find how clearly she recollected all the details of the voyage, and even the words of the conversations which they had had together.

Among other things she remembered that he had spoken of returning to Luxor, and she was conscious of a distinct sensation of pleasure as she reflected upon this possibility.

Betty could not quite understand her own feelings in those days, for, although all the joy of life had been taken away, and the future promised nothing but misery and sacrifice, still she knew that, not even to escape from her present difficulties and coming trials, would she have chosen to return to the dull monotony and security of the Dower House.

She wondered whether she had outlived all her old ideals and enthusiasms, and was growing to be callous and cold-hearted, or whether it could be that the charm of this wonderful new country appealed to her so strongly that it had the power to send the strange gleams of joy, of which she was conscious at times, to her heart.

It is true that the sunshine bewitched her, and the colour and variety of her surroundings were an endless source of delight and interest, but Elizabeth never tried to analyse her feelings beyond this point, nor to realise how often the star-spangled sky reminded her of the evening when Kerr had told her of his love, and how constantly she thought of him, when she looked across the wide river and noticed

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the valleys and ruined temples of Thebes, which he had first pointed out to her on the morning of their arrival at Luxor.

It was one afternoon about a week after the little adventure outside the temple, and Feilden and Elizabeth were again returning to the hotel at the conclusion of their daily walk. Jack, as usual, had been talking about Major Kerr, and speculating as to the probable date of his arrival, so that it seemed quite natural to Betty, and hardly surprising, when, as they entered the verandah, a tall, soldierly figure rose from one of the cane chairs and came forward to meet them.

"How are you, Miss Cathcart?" he said quietly, and her hand was clasped for a moment in his. Then he turned to Feilden, but Dot, who was present, and quite ready to take the entire direction of affairs, began to introduce the two men to each other, with many elaborate explanations and descriptions.

"This is my new Uncle Jack, Major Kerr, he isn't my uncle yet, but he will be, soon. You haven't never seen him before, and he can't see you now. He can't see anything, but he doesn't mind a bit. I'll tell him what you are like. I told him what the old lady was like, the fat one, but she heard me and was very angry. You won't be angry, will you, Major Kerr? I'd better begin now. Uncle Jack, this is Major Kerr, he is taller than you, and—" Rose, who was seated near at hand, had tried vainly to stem the flow of her little daughter's eloquence, but, at this point, Kerr interrupted with decision.

"Gently, my dear girl, not so fast. Mr Feilden and I are old friends, and knew each other long before you were born. There is no need for such a very formal introduction."

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The little party seated themselves, and Jack began to talk eagerly to his old comrade. Rose was busy with preparations for tea, and nobody noticed that Elizabeth, who was sitting a little apart from the others, was strangely silent. After a time she rose from her place, and, entering the hotel, went up to her own room.

A new light had dawned upon her, with startling suddenness, and she felt that she must be alone for a little while—alone with her own thoughts, so that she might, at least, attempt to realise the truth of what had happened.

These wishes for solitude were not, however, destined to be fulfilled immediately, for, when Betty reached her room, she found Nurse established there with some needlework, and quite ready for a friendly, if rather one-sided, conversation.

Elizabeth crossed over to the open window and stood there, looking out dreamily at the ruddy evening sky and the great flights of little birds returning from the corn-fields beyond the village.

She hardly listened at first to Nurse's garrulous chatter, but after a time, as a sentence or two caught her ears, she found that the rambling words were harmonising strangely with her own thoughts.

Kerr had, it appeared, arrived by the afternoon train, and, on his way from the station, had encountered Nurse and Dot. The latter had insisted upon getting into the carriage for the remainder of the drive, and Kerr had invited Nurse also to be one of the party.

Betty had already heard this story from Dot, but now she was to have Nurse's version, and the recital was full of praise of Major Kerr's wonderful kindness and condescension.

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“A real gentleman, ’e is, Miss Betty, and ’andsome, too. ’E gets out of the carriage, and ’ands me in, sitting h’opposite ’imself, with ’is back to the ’orses. And as we drives ’ome ’e couldn’t ’ave talked to me more affable, not if I ’ad been the Queen ’erself.”

“It was very good of him, Nurse,” said Betty, softly, and a tender little smile curved her lips as she spoke.

“Good, I should think it was good,” replied Nurse, with a disdainful sniff, “and there’s not one gentleman in a ’undred as would ’ave done the same. There sits I in the carriage as if I’d been a lady born, and when we gets to the ’otel ’e ’elps me out, as pleasant as you please, with ’is ’at in ’is ’and.”

Nurse talked on, delighted to have secured an audience, but Betty’s attention drifted away again, although in her case, too, Kerr and Kerr alone was the subject and the centre-point of her thoughts. She loved him. That was the wonderful truth which she realised now, without possibility of doubt or mistake. His name, as it recurred again and again in Nurse’s narrative, found its echo in her own heart. She loved him, and he loved her in return. It seemed to Betty that a marvellous light had burst out suddenly upon her, dazzling, and well-nigh blinding her with its unexpected radiance.

Bertram Kerr possessed her whole heart. He was everything in the world to her—everything. She loved him with all the strength and wealth of affection of which she was capable, and, as her nature and character had grown and developed with the passing years, so she realised that this new love was a deeper and a better thing than the girlish passion and devo-

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tion which she had once poured out so unstintingly at Feilden's feet.

The empty niche in her heart was occupied again, but she felt that it was not so much Jack's vacant place which Kerr had taken, but the shrine of the unreal and ideal hero whom she had created for herself, and whom she had loved and worshipped during so many dreary years.

Betty did not attempt to deceive herself, as she stood there, by the open window, with her eyes fixed on the glowing sunset sky. There was in her nature a straight forward simplicity and clearness of vision, and, when once the truth presented itself to her mind, without possibility of mistake, she accepted the situation, and forced herself to face the trials and problems which lay before her.

She was possessed, at the same time, of a keen cultivated intelligence and a vivid imagination, but the latter did not in any way blind her to the realities of life. Instead, perhaps, it only enabled her to see the more clearly all the depths of suffering which the future might hold in store.

As certainly as she realised and accepted the fact of her love for Kerr, so also did she realise and accept all that this love might imply.

It could not be denied that the outlook was a hopeless one, for this new factor in her life must needs make the position still more difficult and dangerous than it had been before. The future of constant self-sacrifice and unselfish devotion, which she had mapped out, would now be nothing more nor less than a lifelong martyrdom.

Kerr must never guess the truth, of course. The secret must be kept from him as faithfully as that other secret—the cold, hard fact of her indifference—

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had to be hidden from poor blind Jack Feilden. It was a misfortune which had overtaken her, a catastrophe which might well bring endless shame and humiliation in its train, for had she not now proved herself to be a false and utterly worthless woman, instead of merely a cold-hearted and fickle one? It had been bad enough and cruel enough to have no affection to give to Feilden, but it was worse, a thousand times worse, to be obliged to confess—although only to herself—that she loved another man in his place.

A crimson blush stole softly over Betty's face, and yet, in spite of it, and in spite of all the self-accusing thoughts which chased each other through her mind, the wonderful light of happiness still shone in her blue eyes.

There would be time enough in the days to come for argument and bitter self-reproach. There would be time—plenty of time—for dread and suffering. At this moment her great love, in its strength and perfection, had cast out fear completely, and it had cast out other things, such as shame and remorse and pity, as well.

The past with its old joys and sorrows, its memories and its dreams, was forgotten; the present, full of difficulties and perplexities, had ceased to exist; even the future must be left to take care of itself.

She loved, and was loved in return. Everything in the world, everything in heaven, and on earth too, became insignificant and meaningless before that one overwhelming truth.

Elizabeth told herself that it must be wrong to feel as she did, for, surely, only a woman who was by nature utterly base and despicable could thus lightly give her heart first to one man and then to another,

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as she had done. It was fitting that unspeakable suffering and shame should be her punishment, and she would accept it, and endure it all, without complaint, in the future.

A wild recklessness stirred in her heart, and her moods alternated in quick succession. It was as if the wild breath of the surrounding desert were influencing her mind, making her eyes brighten and the blood course more quickly through her veins.

She did not lose the consciousness of deserved shame, of guilt even, and of bitter regret. Jack's sightless face seemed to be reproaching her, and his groping hands to be stretched out in vain pleading, and yet, through it all and in spite of it all, she felt as if some wonderful gift had been bestowed upon her, and that she was unspeakably grateful, and happier than she had ever been in her life before.

Suddenly Nurse's voice broke in, once more, upon her mistress's reverie.

"It's all very well to say 'Yes, Nurse,' and 'No, Nurse,' but it's my opinion, Miss Betty, as you 'aven't 'eard a word of what I've been saying. 'Ow-ever, believe it or not, as you like, I says as Major Kerr is as good-'earted a gentleman, and as good-looking a one too, as me, nor you either, if it comes to that, is likely to see in many a long day's march; and I, for one, don't care as who 'ears me say it."

She gathered up her finished work and walked out of the room with an offended air, and she was still muttering to herself as she made her way down the long corridor.

"It don't make no difference to me, Miss Betty,

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and you can just say whatever you like, but if I was in your shoes, upon my word if I wouldn't break off with that poor chap, Mr Feilden, and take up with the Major in his place. A fine pair they would make, to be sure, and I must say as I never did much cotton to Mr Jack, nor never shall."

CHAPTER X

"OH, Mr Feilden, such a splendid idea! It will be full moon to-night, and we must all go to Karnak. It is quite the thing to do, and we shall have the most ripping, heavenly time."

Miss Gladys Norton was the speaker, and she had just appeared on the verandah of the hotel, attired, as usual, in an elaborate costume, and with her hands clasped together enthusiastically.

It was very pleasant out there on the shady verandah, for, although it was still early, the sun was powerful. Mrs Brown and Elizabeth had been established for some time with their books and work, but the three men, Feilden, Kerr and Haynes, had only just joined them.

Miss Norton chose this moment for her entry. She had not troubled to come near Rose and Betty while they were alone, for the exclusive society of her own sex was never very much to her taste, but, as soon as her watchful eyes descried Jack and his two companions entering the garden gate and strolling up the path towards the hotel, her tactics altered completely.

She deserted, without any ceremony, Miss Gale and a couple of American boys with whom she had been carrying on a brisk conversation, and, hurrying out on to the verandah, seated herself, with a brilliant smile and a swirl of pink muslin skirts, in a low chair at Feilden's side.

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The flirtation between the two had been prospering apace of late, and Jack, to whom no excitement or gaiety seemed to come amiss, found endless pleasure in the girl's vulgar slang, foolish, and often ill-natured, chatter and pert repartee.

Her noisy laughter and taste for practical jokes appealed to his sense of humour, and he openly declared that he considered her a jolly clever girl, up to any lark, and a thoroughly good sort all round.

As to Miss Norton herself, the affair which at first had been merely a jest, was now a very serious matter, for she had ascertained that Feilden had a large income and a good social position, and was, in short, an excellent match.

"He may not be much to look at, my dear girl," she remarked to Mabel Gale, "but I can tell you that he's no end of a duke when he's at home. A family mansion in Kent, hunting, shooting, heirlooms and all the rest of it. Oh, yes, he's a regular swell, and a pleasant enough fellow too, even if he is a bit dotty."

The young lady, therefore, applied herself in earnest to the task of captivating poor Jack, and she flattered herself that, so far, she had been eminently successful in her endeavours, although it was a little annoying to find that she could not arouse the haughty and objectionable Miss Cathcart to any exhibition of anger or jealousy.

Mrs Brown glanced up from her work with a little frown of displeasure when Miss Norton appeared upon the scene, but the newcomer detested Rose almost as heartily as she did Elizabeth, and she did not trouble her head in the least as to whether she were welcome or the reverse.

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"I am a man's girl," she was fond of declaring, "and never bother myself much about women." She proceeded now to arrange her crisp skirts to her satisfaction, playfully abstracted a cushion from Feilden's chair to place behind her own head, and then launched out into a graphic description of the proposed moonlight expedition to Karnak.

"The 'bus will go at eight-thirty. I have just heard about it from the hall porter, and they charge ten piastres a head. That won't ruin anybody, will it? You shall treat me, Mr Feilden"—she paused to pat the blind man's hand with an arch smile—"and Major Kerr will, I am sure, be only too delighted to be Miss Cathcart's cavalier."

She paused again, and Jack laughed loudly, but the silence with which the rest of the listeners treated her sallies did not disconcert her in the least. She went on undauntedly.

"The 'bus holds ten, so we must, of course, be equal numbers, five ladies and five gentlemen. You and me, Mr Feilden, that will be two, and I will promise to look after you, if Miss Cathcart won't be jealous." She glanced sideways at Betty's quiet face, and Jack Feilden laughed again.

"Betty jealous! That's a good idea, isn't it, Betty? Hurry up, Miss Norton. It's a rattling good plan—Karnak by moonlight. You will have to describe the moonlight to me, and Karnak too. We shall be quite sentimental, by Jove; and who else is to join our little party?"

"Miss Cathcart, of course, and Major Kerr, Mrs Brown and Dr Haynes. Mabel is dying to go, and those two Yankee boys—not half bad little chaps—will have to look after her."

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"Good." Jack sat upright in his chair, and there was an eager expression on his thin face. "That will be first-rate. Nine altogether. And what do you say to telling the hotel people to put up a nice little supper—champagne, you know, and all that sort of thing. We may as well have a regular good time while we are about it."

Haynes looked up from the newspaper which he was reading. "I'm afraid that it will be too long an excursion for you," he said quietly, addressing Feilden. But Miss Norton leaned forward and flicked the doctor's face playfully with the horse-hair fly-whisk that she was holding in her hand.

"Oh, naughty, naughty man!" she cried, with what was meant to be a most entrancing smile. "If you try to spoil my little plan I will never, never speak to you again. Of course Mr Feilden must go. He won't be the least bit tired, and we should not enjoy ourselves at all without him."

Haynes moved his chair, without a word, to some distance from the speaker, and reopened his paper. Miss Norton returned to the charge with undiminished enthusiasm.

"It will be quite too lovely and delightful. Mabel shall sing. You have never heard her sing yet, Mr Feilden, and she really has rather a nice voice. There is her guitar, too. I will recite, and one of those two Yankee men plays the banjo. We will have a grand concert in the ruins, up on the top of the pylon, if you like. Is not that a fine idea? And you are fond of music, I know."

Jack was charmed with this elaboration of the scheme. The very absurdity and vulgarity of it appealed to him irresistibly. He declared that a variety

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entertainment would be the greatest fun out, proposed that the numbers should be increased from nine to twenty at the very least, and went on to announce that, of course, Betty would be charmed to contribute to the evening's entertainment. "She sings just like a regular *prima donna*. She does indeed, upon my word. How is it, Betty, that you have never once given us a song since you arrived? I have asked you dozens of times, but you've always had some excuse. Anyway, you shan't get out of it this evening; and I can tell you, Miss Norton, that there's a treat in store for you all. Come, Betty, old girl—where are you? Say that you will be delighted to perform at the Karnak concert to-night."

Elizabeth laid down her work and her lips quivered. She glanced from one to another of the group with an expression of perplexed anxiety on her face.

Haynes had given most explicit orders that nothing should be said which might serve to remind Feilden of his years of misery, and, so far, these directions had been scrupulously carried out, but the loss of Elizabeth's voice, occasioned as it had been by the long illness which had followed her lover's supposed death, could hardly be explained without some direct allusion being made to the calamity. Any such allusion, she knew, must, at all costs, be avoided.

Jack had loved Betty's singing so much in the old days. He would have been content to listen to her music for hours at a time, and she dreaded the effects of the disappointment which she knew would be his when he realised that her beautiful voice was gone for ever.

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He had already suggested, more than once, that she should sing to him, but she had, hitherto, managed to put him off with trivial excuses. She was tired, the piano was out of tune, or there were people in the room and they would not like to be disturbed. Jack had grumbled, but had submitted to her wishes. Now, however, it was a different matter. He was determined to have his own way, and the look of sullen obstinacy which she was beginning to dread, had come into his sightless face.

She felt as if she were caught in a cruel web of difficulty and discomfiture.

How could she explain everything, now, at this moment? With all these people around her, and with Gladys Norton's malicious, dark eyes fixed upon her troubled face.

"I am sorry, Jack," she began. "Very sorry—but—" and then she paused, as if at a loss how to continue her sentence.

Haynes, noticing her hesitation, came to the rescue.

"You must excuse Miss Cathcart," he said, and there was a note of decision in his voice. "It is quite out of the question that she should sing. You remember that she has had a sore throat, and was hoarse for several days. And as for the other matter—this expedition to Karnak—I am afraid that I must put my foot down there too. As your medical attendant I cannot allow it for a moment. You are a lot better, my dear fellow, but you are not quite a Hercules yet, by any means, and a moonlight picnic is an impossibility."

"An impossibility," cried Rose Brown, joining in now for the first time. "I should think so, indeed. Miss Norton was only joking, of course. Christy

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minstrels and Karnak, they do not sound very well together, do they? And, although I am not particularly romantic or sentimental, still one must draw the line somewhere. Besides, I, for one, loathe ruins and detest moonlight."

"Oh, come, I say, Haynes. This is all utter rot. Why on earth shouldn't I go where I like and do what I like? You all seem determined to make an idiotic invalid of me. I'm getting just about sick of being ordered to do this, that and the other, and played the fool with, as if I was a school-boy with a bear-leader."

It was easy to see that Jack was rapidly losing his temper. A heavy frown gathered on his face, and there were hard lines about his lips. The hands that were resting on his knees trembled violently. "I won't stand it—I won't," he continued, rising to his feet, and speaking in a loud, angry voice. "I've put up with a good deal, but this is a bit too much—" He stopped suddenly, as if the excitement and the effort of the long speech had exhausted him, and the agitation faded out of his haggard face. "I'm sick to death of it all, and it's beastly hot out here. Kerr, old chap, you may as well come with me into the house."

Kerr, who had been sitting smoking in silence during the conversation and altercation, got up from his seat at once, and, with Jack leaning on his arm, walked slowly into the hotel. Haynes followed them in a few minutes.

There was a worried, anxious expression on the young doctor's face as he entered the hotel, for he was, to tell the truth, by no means satisfied with the progress that had been made by his patient during the last few weeks. Feilden was decidedly stronger

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in many ways, but the mental improvement had not kept pace with the physical.

Even to himself Haynes would hardly acknowledge yet that he was disappointed, but it was useless to deny that the fits of depression had been more frequent and alarming of late, and he had begun to wonder whether it might not be advisable to return to England earlier than had been arranged, in order that a brain specialist might be consulted.

He knew that Feilden was on the brink of one of his paroxysms of melancholy now, and he realised that a trying and wearisome day was in prospect.

In addition to other difficulties, Jack was subject to sudden likes and dislikes, and grew more and more capricious and hard to please. He had conceived a violent friendship for Kerr, whom he insisted should be his constant companion, and he became angry and excited immediately that his wishes were opposed.

Although he still felt the keenest interest in his strange patient, Haynes realised that his position was no sinecure, and that it carried with it an overwhelming weight of responsibility and anxiety.

There were others in the hotel, besides the young doctor, who noticed that there was, at times, something disquieting about poor Feilden's manner and demeanour, and the most outspoken of these observers was old Nurse. She did not hesitate to recount her opinions and misgivings to Mrs Brown at great length.

"It's my private belief, Miss Rose," she said one day—Nurse, having known Mrs Brown since she was a child, frequently addressed her in this manner—"It's my private belief as Mr Jack 'aint quite right

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in 'is 'ead. Not as I would 'int as much to Miss Betty, but to you it don't matter, and I likes to speak my mind. There's a look in 'is face sometimes that reminds me of my sister Louisa's 'usband's brother Bill—'im as went mad sudden, one morning, and killed his wife and three children—not to mention the youngest, as was a baby in h'arms at the time. 'E was shut up in the lunatic asylum, was Bill, after that, and Louisa's 'usband used to go and see 'im. 'E had lurid interviews, miss, you understand, but they never let him come out again, poor chap, not even for a day, and he died six years afterwards, of double ammonia, with compensations. Well, Miss Rose, I saw Bill more than once, just before the h'accident, and I says to Louisa, says I, ' You mark my words if there ain't something the matter with Bill, for 'e 'as a glare in 'is eyes as I, for one, don't 'alf like.' I was quite right about Bill, you see, miss, and Mr Jack reminds me of 'im now something wonderful. 'Is eyes would glare too, you may be sure, if 'e 'ad any eyes to glare."

Nurse paused, and shook her head dismally. But, although Rose laughed at her prophecies, she did not, nevertheless, feel quite easy in her mind. She found herself watching Jack furtively now and then, and noting, with nervous misgiving, the spasmodic twitch of his features and the sound of his loud, sudden laughter.

" If 'e 'ad eyes 'e would glare too." There had been something horribly graphic and suggestive about Nurse's words, and on this particular morning Rose was feeling more than usually disturbed and anxious. She was a prey to vague fears and presentiments, and it seemed to her that they were all living, as it were, in an atmosphere that was charged

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with possibilities of disaster and heavy with the weight of approaching tragedy.

Rose wondered often, as she looked at Elizabeth's pale, troubled face, whether she also were growing alarmed as to Feilden's health and mental condition, and she wished, with all her heart, that her sister-in-law would confide in her, so that they might discuss the worries and difficulties of the situation together.

"Things never seem half so bad when you have had a good talk about them," she said to herself, but all her kindly words and well-meant hints were disregarded, and it seemed quite impossible to break through the icy barrier of reserve and silence, behind which, of late, Betty had entrenched herself.

Had she been able to guess at the truth Mrs Brown would have discovered that anxiety about Jack's health was, by no means, the greatest of the other woman's troubles, and, indeed, as she racked her brain wearily over the difficulties which beset her on every side, poor Elizabeth was forced to the miserable conclusion that his death—and her own as well—would be the surest and simplest solution of the problem—the only satisfactory manner in which the web of deceit and circumstance in which they were enmeshed, could be disentangled.

Every day the situation seemed to become more unbearable and the outlook more hopeless, while the fact that Feilden insisted obstinately that Kerr should be his—and her—constant companion, added immeasurably to her trials.

It was not that she had ever swerved from her determination to devote her whole life to the work of atonement. Even in the first moment of revelation, when she had realised that she loved Bertram Kerr,

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the possibility of deserting Jack had never entered her mind. She would be true to her old promises. Jack must never know that she was false to him in her heart, and Kerr must never guess that she had learnt to return his love.

Elizabeth was a brave woman, and her character was a strong and resolute one. She did not doubt her ability to keep the two secrets, but, all the same, the strain put upon her was a heavy one, and it began to tell upon her more and more severely every day.

Her strength and energy flagged a little, her cheeks grew thin and there were dark shadows under her soft eyes. She realised then that she had never before even guessed at the infinite depths and possibilities of human suffering.

Love and pity, the two emotions which she knew now were opposed to each other, and not akin, seemed to be fighting for the mastery in her soul; and while, at one moment, she would tell herself that life would be unbearable if lived apart from the man she loved, at another a perfect passion of pity for poor, injured Jack would wring her heart.

The conviction that he had done nothing to forfeit her love, and that she was herself responsible for the catastrophe, gave additional bitterness to Betty's thoughts and additional poignancy to her compassion.

This morning it was pity that was in the ascendant, for, in spite of the foolish obstinacy and exaggerated eagerness which he had displayed, Elizabeth's sympathies were entirely with Feilden in his useless rebellion against the restrictions which were imposed upon him, in his hatred of the *rôle* of an invalid, and in his ardent longing to share in the employments and amusements of his friends. There was something terribly pathetic, it seemed to her, in his futile

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snatches at his lost strength and in his vain efforts to be like other people once again.

She felt her eyes smarting with tears as she recalled the disappointment, the anger and the hopelessness with which, at last, poor Jack had given up the struggle and resigned himself to be led away into the hotel.

Betty got up from her seat wearily, and stooped to pick up the book which she had been reading.

"I must go in now," she said, and there was a little break in her voice. "Perhaps Jack would like me to sit with him, or to read aloud for a bit. You will excuse me, Rose dear, won't you?"

Mrs Brown got up too, and stepping, forward impulsively, she laid her hand on Elizabeth's arm.

"All right, dear," she said; "you go in, and I will take Dot for a walk. And—and, Betty, I don't want to bother you, but—well, if there is anything that I could do, remember that I would give the whole world to be able to help you."

"Thank you, Rose," answered Betty very gently, and then, for a moment, the two women's eyes met. As Mrs Brown turned away and gathered up her scattered embroidery silks, she realised that her sister-in-law's trouble was a very deep one, although she could only guess vaguely at its cause and meaning.

Dot found her mother a very silent and uninteresting companion as the two set out on their walk, with Nurse, an incongruous little figure in a short black dress and a crêpe-trimmed bonnet, in attendance.

The child's eager questions and exclamations elicited but small response this morning, and, as Rose sauntered along, under her green-lined umbrella, there was an unusually thoughtful expression on her piquant face.

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It was a trying world, she told herself, with a sigh, and, although it seemed cruel and heartless even to think such a thing, she could not help wishing that poor Jack Feilden had never come back to life and that Betty's solitude had been left undisturbed.

CHAPTER XI

THE fears of Dr Haynes that Jack Feilden's excitement and anger would be followed by one of his dreaded fits of depression proved to be only too well founded, and the attack was one of the worst and the longest in duration that the patient had experienced.

All through the dragging hours of that long, weary day the blind man remained closely shut into his own room, moody, speechless and unapproachable. The young doctor's face grew more and more harassed and anxious as the other refused to eat or drink, left all questions unanswered, and never stirred from his position at the open window, where he sat, with his shoulders bowed, his elbows on his knees, and his forehead resting on his clenched, sunburnt hands.

Towards evening the cloud began to lift a little, and it became evident that, for the time being, at anyrate, the worst was over. Jack, as was always the case when once he had roused himself from his condition of apathetic melancholy, recovered his usual spirits with unexpected rapidity, and seemed quite oblivious of what had occurred. He requested the doctor to read aloud to him from a newspaper that had just arrived from England, sent a reassuring message to Betty, and finally declared that he was perfectly well and fully capable of joining the rest of the party at dinner. He was a little silent and subdued during the course of the meal, it is true, and his face looked even more than usually drawn and

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haggard, but otherwise he seemed to have returned to his normal condition, and an outsider would hardly have suspected that anything had been amiss.

After dinner they all went out into the garden in front of the hotel, and sat for some time under the trees. It was warm, windless and very peaceful. The deep blue sky seemed to grow every moment more clear and transparent as the full moon rose above the motionless, drooping fronds of the palm trees.

The three men, Feilden, Haynes and Kerr, were smoking, and an Arab servant brought out a tray set with tiny cups of Turkish coffee, which he placed on a table at Rose's elbow.

From beyond the gate which leads out into the village street, could be heard the harsh, vehement voices of natives and the jingle of donkeys' harness. After a time the hotel omnibus drove up to the gate, and then there began a noisy clamour of shrill chatter, laughter and hurrying footsteps, as Miss Norton and her friends streamed out on to the verandah.

It had never occurred to Gladys as possible that she might give up the proposed expedition in consequence of Feilden's inability to share in it; and, indeed, the opposition and difficulties had only added to the attractiveness of the scheme. "No idiot of a doctor should be allowed to dictate to her," she had declared openly, and as for Betty Cathcart, and that conceited, interfering little minx, Mrs Brown, she, for one, would greatly prefer their room to their company.

The preparations for the picnic and *al fresco* concert, therefore, had gone on apace, and now, as the party streamed out of the hotel, it could be seen that

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one of the young Americans carried a banjo case, while the other had in his charge both Miss Gale's blue-ribboned guitar and Miss Gale herself.

Miss Norton's sharp black eyes quickly espied the quiet little group under the palm trees, and she stopped to call out a cheerful farewell to her admirer.

"Hullo, Mr Feilden, so there you are again. Where have you been hiding yourself all day long? Did the doctor put you into the corner because you were a bad little boy? Oh, naughty, naughty—So sorry you are not coming with us. We mean to have a heavenly time, and we ought to have you, Mrs Brown, to keep us all in order. Really, we are quite a nice party, two girls and two fellows—no chaperon, What do you think of that? Well, I must be off. *Au revoir.*"

She kissed her hand with a brilliant smile and a backward glance that was intended to be irresistibly arch and alluring, and then hurried down the path in the wake of her companions.

There were several minutes more of bustle and confusion before the omnibus finally drove away.

Before long other tourists came out of the hotel, also bent on moonlight expeditions. They were to ride donkeys, and there were vociferous disputes among the donkey-boys before the choice of animals was made. The turmoil died away at last in a chorus of shouts and the quick thud of unshod hoofs on the dusty road.

It was more quiet than ever in the moonlit garden when the last excursionists had departed, and the place seemed to be almost oppressively silent and deserted.

Feilden's mood had changed again since dinner—perhaps it may have been Miss Norton's parting speech

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that aroused him—and, in spite of his evident fatigue, he seemed to grow restless and irritable. He contradicted Haynes brusquely more than once, and refused to listen to his well-meant suggestions of a stroll in the garden. Finally he got up from his seat and laid his hand on Kerr's arm.

"Look here," he said, "it's dull, beastly dull, sitting about in this bally garden. Why shouldn't we have a little moonlight outing of our own?"

"Where do you want to go, old man?" asked Kerr, glancing across at Haynes, who nodded his head in response. "I'm up to anything, but it's a bit late to think of Karnak."

"Hang Karnak," retorted Jack, sharply, "I'm sick of the name of the place. Let's go into Luxor Temple. We went there one evening ten years ago. Do you remember? But Betty has never seen it by moonlight. Yes, we'll go to Luxor; and look here, old chap, we'll go by ourselves—you understand? Just you and I and Betty. Rose too, of course, we must have Rose, but not that beggar Haynes. Get rid of Haynes somehow, Kerr. I can't stand him to-night. He's been bothering about after me all day, and he's watching me—I know he's watching me—all the time."

There was a rather embarrassed silence, for the whole of this speech had been spoken in a husky but perfectly audible whisper. The doctor, however, did not appear to take any offence at the vagaries of his strange patient. His eyes were fixed attentively upon the pale, sightless face, across which—or it may have been only the effect of the shifting moonbeams—an expression of strange cunning and malice seemed to flicker.

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"All right, Feilden," said Kerr, cheerfully, taking no notice of the request with which Jack's speech had concluded, "your idea is not half a bad one. What do you say, Mrs Brown? You were very severe with Miss Norton this morning, but I hope that you will condescend to join our little expedition. At all events, you shall not be offended with coon songs or banjos."

Rose laughed, but shook her head resolutely. She had promised to play bridge, and could not very well break her engagement. Besides, as she had often told them, ruins and temples were not at all to her taste.

She got up from her seat and gathered the folds of her evening dress gracefully together with one hand, while Elizabeth watched her with a feeling that was very like despair in her heart.

The idea of the hour that was before her, to be spent alone with these two men—the man whom she loved, and the other for whom she could feel nothing but pity and remorseful sympathy—was a terrible one, and it seemed to her that even Rose, her oldest friend, was deserting her in her hour of need.

The whole day had been long and trying. Something of the dark cloud of melancholy which had brooded over Jack had touched her too, so that she felt strangely despondent and sick at heart.

Never had the present seemed so difficult, or the future so full of sorrow and despair, and yet, for poor, blind Jack's sake, the perplexities and the miseries must always be hidden beneath laughter and light, cheerful words.

She shivered slightly as Kerr wrapped her cloak round her shoulders, but, although he noticed it,

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he said nothing, and, a few minutes later, the trio walked slowly down the broad path and along the village street in the direction of the temple.

If Feilden had not been blind he would have seen that everything had altered very little since that moonlight night, ten years ago, when he had started out upon another walk, the solitary expedition that was destined to have such a disastrous ending.

At the gate of the temple enclosure the native guardian was lying on the ground, smoking a cigarette. He got up, at the sound of the approaching footsteps, and swung open the wooden gate, with a word of greeting and a broad smile. The moonlight gleamed on his dark eyes, white teeth, and on the metal badge that he wore on his left arm.

The visitors entered, and passing down the slope, where Kerr guided Jack carefully across the rocky, uneven ground, made their way into the great open court of the temple. There was nobody to be seen. Luxor had been deserted for the more distant Karnak, and Feilden, Kerr and Betty had the place to themselves.

The silence was broken now and then by the sharp cry of an owl from the summit of one of the towering columns, and, far away in the town, the throb of native music could be heard. It was so faint, so persistent and so monotonous, that it was more like an echo or a memory than an actual sound. Even the incessant cries of the dogs seemed to have died away for the time.

There was a wonderful sense of peace and mystery abroad. It was as if everything lay under the spell of a magician's wand. The sky was clear and exquisite, and the great silvery moon hung like a lamp, suspended above the ruined pylon of the temple.

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Although he could see nothing of the beauty of the scene Feilden seemed to feel the effect of its soothing influence. He had been cheerful and talkative as they walked from the hotel, but now he became silent and subdued once more. He leaned heavily and wearily on Kerr's supporting arm.

Even Elizabeth was, to a certain extent, soothed and comforted, and, although her thoughts still wandered to her own troubles and difficulties, they seemed to become less important and all-absorbing out there in the moonlight, with the huge columns and gateways before her which had lasted through so many years and so many centuries.

The men who had built them, and who had carved those figures and cartouches on walls and architraves, were all dead thousands of years ago; and the people who had worshipped in the temple, and who had looked up, and admired the reliefs and the paintings, they were dead and forgotten as well.

Thousands of years. It was difficult to realise such a length of time. And, perhaps, these columns and statues would be standing here still when another thousand years had passed away.

Thousands of years ago! Thousands of years hence! The weary decade of Jack's captivity and of her own loneliness seemed a small matter. Even the long future which might lie before her—twenty years, thirty, or forty—sank into insignificance.

Betty's thoughts wandered on, further and further afield, and she found herself dreaming about those strange people of the old world with whose history she was becoming familiar, whose statues and portraits she had been shown, and whose dainty jewels and ornaments she had seen and handled

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Had they—she asked herself—ever been troubled and unhappy as she was now? Did they have codes of honour and duty which forced them in one direction when, all the time, their hearts bade them pursue another course?

She glanced up at the calm, impassive face of Rameses—for they were in the furthest court of the temple now, where the huge statues of the king stand between the close-set columns—and she wondered whether Nefert-eri, who stood there so small and demure at his side, her crowned head barely reaching the king's knee, had really loved her great husband. And those other women, pictured on tomb and temple walls, those women with their delicate, inscrutable faces, their transparent robes and their jewels, had they been happy or miserable? And had they had love-stories, romances—or tragedies, perhaps—of their own?

Feilden's voice, weary and irritable, broke in sharply upon her reverie.

"Well, I must say you two are pretty dull this evening. Not very lively companions, upon my word. Wake up, Betty, my dear girl, and talk about something. We ought to have Miss Norton here, and the banjo, to make us a little more cheerful."

Elizabeth roused herself with an effort. Jack's words, as they so often did, grated on her nerves, and she felt as if all the magic charm and beauty of the place had been roughly dispelled.

Kerr answered Feilden's speech with a short laugh. "Really, my dear fellow," he said, "you might be a little more considerate. Here were we, Miss Cathcart and I, occupied with all sorts of lofty thoughts, and you spoil everything with your talk of banjos. Let us hear what you were meditating

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about, Miss Cathcart. 'A penny for your thoughts,' as our nurses used to say. Or I will offer a piastre. You were looking so serious, a moment ago, that I am sure your thoughts must be worth twopence-halfpenny at the least."

Betty felt that her cheeks were growing hot out there in the cool moonlight. What would Major Kerr think if he could guess at the thoughts which had been passing through her mind? She turned away hastily.

"No," she said, "no, I was not thinking about anything particular. I was only wondering about this temple, and what it must have been like, when it was new, thousands of years ago."

She seated herself, as she spoke, on a large flat stone, at the base of one of the colossal statues. Kerr guided Jack to a place at her side. Then, taking a cigar from his case, he lit it, and leaned back against the huge figure.

"It's a wonderful place, certainly," he said, after a pause. "Look at the face of that Rameses statue over on the other side. The old fellow looks every inch a king, doesn't he? I wonder whether the court sculptor flattered him. You ought to go up to Abu Simbel, Miss Cathcart. Even this place can't be compared with the temple there. I'd like to see it again at midnight, and those great figures sitting in a row outside it, staring up at the moon."

Betty glanced at the speaker, and then turned were away again as she found that his blue eyes watching her attentively.

"It's lovely," she said. "Yes, by moonlight, it's all simply perfect. But, in the daytime, there are so many things to spoil it. The sightseers,

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with their Kodaks and guide-books, the dragomans, and the Germans, who want to have themselves and their fat wives photographed with the temple as a background. There were not any German tourists in the time of the ancient Egyptians, but I'm afraid that you would have found it rather dull, Jack dear. Banjos had not been invented then, the hotels had not been built, and—well, America and Australia had not been discovered."

Jack did not answer, and indeed he hardly seemed to have heard what Elizabeth was saying. He was restless and inattentive, and appeared unable to keep his thoughts, for more than a few moments, on any one subject.

He had moved a little nearer to the great statue now, and was passing his hands, which, although they were hard and roughened, had yet acquired something of the blind man's dexterity, over the incised figures and hieroglyphics with which the base was decorated.

"Hullo," he said, "this stone is a regular Braille's system. There must have been a good many idiots of blind men among those old Gippies. Poor devils. I wonder whether they sat by the sides of the road, had pariah dogs to lead them about, and read these bally cartouche things with their fingers. Let's have a shot now. Here's a zig-zag, and here's a frog. No, by Jove, it's a chicken. I can feel its beak. I am getting on now. Top of the form, you bet, and a prize at the end of the term. Now, what's this?—a bee; and here's a cross—no, it's not a cross. Oh, I know, it's that bally old 'Key of Life.'"

He was growing eager and excited over the childish task that he had set himself, and Elizabeth's eyes

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were very soft and pitiful as she watched him. As Kerr glanced down at her his face grew gentle too, as if in sympathy, and there was a new light in his eyes.

Betty roused herself at last, and turned to Kerr with a little smile.

"The Key of Life," she said, as if she had only just heard Feilden's words. "It's a nice name, isn't it? But I wonder what it means. I should like to know, for sometimes life is rather puzzling. I don't want the archaeological meaning, or the Egyptologist's, but the real one. The Key—the clue, that would make life, and everything else, a little easier to understand."

Her voice sunk into a whisper, and her eyes were fixed on the sky with its great glowing moon and pin-points of stars. Before Kerr had time to reply, she spoke again, and answered her own question.

"I think that it must be beauty," she said, and her voice was dreamy, as if she were talking to herself rather than to her two companions. "Think of the moonlight, and the blue sky, and the rose-coloured hills across the river. It seems as if pain and grief would not be so hard and terrible out here, where there are no dark days nor fogs, and where you have the sunset and the afterglow every evening. Those old Egyptians must have thought the same, for, if they had not valued beauty and art above everything, they would not have troubled to carve all these wonderful pictures on the hard stone walls. Beauty, and light, and colour must make things easier, don't you think? And, perhaps, even death would not seem to matter much if you had a splendid tomb, with jewels and garlands

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in it, and processions of little girls carrying blue lotus flowers on the walls."

She broke off with a laugh at her own foolishness, but her eyes were still sad and wistful. Kerr threw away his cigar and leaned one elbow against the broken granite foot of the statue.

"It all sounds very pretty, Miss Cathcart, but I'm afraid that you are a bit out. Beauty, and beauty alone, would not be much of a Key, I'm afraid. One wants something stronger than that to help one to worry along through life. If I were given my choice I'd say work—real, hard work. Or, if you want to be poetical, call it duty. It comes to the same thing, and it is the best Key of Life that I know of, by a very long way. If you are lucky, and have plenty of tough, hard work, there's not much time left over to spend in worrying one's head about the difficulties and the troubles and the meanings of it all."

He paused, and, as Betty glanced up quickly at the strong, grave face above her, she knew, instinctively, that he was thinking of that starlit night on the Nile when he had asked her to be his wife, and she had told him, so joyfully and so confidently, the story of her long engagement to Jack Feilden, and how no other man could ever have a place in her heart.

What a mean and contemptible creature he would think her now, were it possible for him to read her thoughts and to know that she had proved faithless, even to that vaunted love. He would despise her as much as she despised herself, and yet she was glad to know that he still remembered.

There was, besides this, some little measure of

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hope and comfort to be gathered from the words which he had just spoken.

Duty, that was to be his remedy, was it? She might do worse than follow the example, for, surely, —her eyes rested for a moment on Jack's bowed shoulders and silvered head—surely there would be plenty of work and duty in the dreary future that lay before her.

"Believe me," Kerr began again, and this time it seemed to Betty that his words were a direct answer to her own thoughts. "Believe me, there's nothing in the world like good honest work, and plenty of it, when you are feeling a bit down on your luck and worried. Pictures and scenery, or even blue skies and perpetual sunshine, can't touch it. Beauty is your definition of the Key of Life. Work, or rather duty, is mine, and I think that you would find that my choice would turn out to be the best of the two, in the long run."

Elizabeth smiled, but did not answer. She was feeling soothed and contented out there, in the soft moonlight, and more at her ease with Kerr than she had done since his arrival in Luxor.

In the days of the Nile voyage, it is true, she had found him a delightful companion, and they had always had plenty to say to each other, but, of late, things had been very different. A barrier of reserve had arisen between them, and she had been uncomfortable and conscious of an awkwardness and lack of self-possession that was quite foreign to her nature.

Now, for the moment, under the magic spell of the place and the hour, the constraint had vanished and she felt satisfied and at her ease.

"Beauty and duty," she repeated softly. "But

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I wonder what the old Egyptians would have said to our definitions, and our meanings, of their 'Key of Life?' "

And then there was an interruption, and 'one which was as startling as it was unexpected. Feilden, whose presence the other two had almost forgotten, and who had seemed to be still intent on the carved stone, rose suddenly to his feet and stepped out of the shadow into the white, brilliant glare of the moonlight.

"Beauty," he cried, speaking in a harsh, violent voice that they had never heard before, "beauty and duty. Oh, what rot you talk, what utter, idiotic rot. 'The Key of Life,' indeed. I can tell you what the 'Key of Life' is. The principal thing, the only thing in the whole world. It's cruelty, yes, cruelty, and pain, and suffering, and every kind of wickedness. That's what it is, for all your drivel about beauty and art. Cruelty, and torment, and pain."

He accompanied his words with strange, vehement gestures, and then he turned towards Kerr and Elizabeth so sharply that it seemed as if he must be able to see them, and as if his sightless eyes had the power to read their inmost thoughts. "You know nothing," he went on, "nothing, nothing, but I know."

He burst suddenly into a peal of loud, wild laughter — laughter that had nothing of mirth in it but only unutterable misery and derision. It seemed to jangle and resound among the great statues and the broken columns, and then to echo and re-echo, in a way that was unspeakably ghostly and horrible, from all the arcades and dark, hidden chambers of the temples.

Elizabeth cowered back against the granite base

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of the colossal figure with wide, terrified eyes. There was silence for a moment, and an owl hooted from the summit of the ruined pylon.

"Pain and suffering and misery." Feilden repeated the words again, but his voice had changed now and had lost its fierce, passionate ring. "But you don't know what it means, and you never will know. Blazing heat in the daytime and cold at night. Bitter winter nights, when you can't get warm, and haven't any covering but rags. Torture and pain and blindness, and dirt, always dirt. Treated like a dog, and worse than a dog. Starvation and thirst and work, hard, brutal work. And you talk about beauty," he laughed again. "But you know nothing, nothing."

There was something terrible and ghastly in the sight of that gesticulating figure, standing there before them, with his grey disordered hair, and with the blaze of the moonlight full on his blind, contorted face. As Betty crouched back against the supporting stone, watching him, she felt as if she were as powerless and incapable of movement as the great granite statue above her.

Kerr stepped forward, and, as he did so, it could be seen that even his stern, quiet face was strangely moved. He laid his hand on Feilden's arm gently.

"Come, Jack," he said, but the blind man dragged himself away violently from the restraining grasp.

"Ten years of misery, ten years of torture, ten years of hell," he muttered; "and it will never come to an end—never, never, never. I wish I was dead. Oh, God, I wish I was dead. He's blinded my eyes, and he's beaten me like a dog, and he's tied my hands and my feet. He's tied them with ropes that won't

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come undone—thin ropes that cut into the flesh. Ten years of it all—ten years—ten years. Curse him, I say, curse him, the devil, and curse the whole damned, beastly show.”

He flung up his arms as he spoke, high above his head, and shook his clenched fists in the face of the cold, brilliant moon. The coat sleeves slipped back, and the scars that encircled his wrists like dark bracelets were distinctly visible.

And then, suddenly, the arms fell heavily to his sides and the grey head dropped forward on to his breast in an attitude of utter weariness and despondency. He turned and groped feebly with his outstretched hands.

“Where are you, Kerr?” he said, and his voice was dull and lifeless. “Where are you? It is getting late and cold—very cold. We had better be going home.”

It seemed strange and unnatural to Elizabeth, when the slow, silent walk back to the hotel was over, to find that everything was the same as when they had left it a couple of hours—or was it years—ten years—ago?

The scene in the temple had unnerved her completely, and she felt as if she had passed through some great experience or crisis in her life.

Her dazed eyes wandered vaguely over the familiar scene. There was the wide hall with its brightly-coloured walls painted with figures of Egyptian gods and goddesses. There were the basket chairs and the divans, the little tea-tables and the notices about gymkhanas and the coming fancy-dress ball. The mere sight of all the commonplace details of everyday life seemed, in a measure, to restore Betty's equanimity. Her face began to lose its expression

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of stunned bewilderment, and a touch of colour came back into her pallid cheeks.

Haynes, it was evident, had been on the watch for Feilden's return. He came forward at once and hurried him away to his rooms, and then the other two crossed the hall and joined Mrs Brown, who was sitting alone in a comfortable corner, with the usual tangle of silk and embroidery on her lap. She looked up with a smile of welcome as her friends approached.

"So here you are at last," she said. "I was beginning to think that you were never coming back. Sit down, Major Kerr, and Betty, dear, let me help you off with your cloak. There is no need for you to think of going to bed yet, and I want you to tell me all your adventures."

Betty seated herself rather wearily on the low couch and loosened her cloak as she did so. One of the fastenings caught, for a moment, in the long chain that she was wearing round her neck. Rose stooped forward to disentangle it, and the bright blue colour of the little "Key of Life" attracted her attention.

"So you still have your mascot, Betty," she said. "I'm sure I hope that it has brought you lots of good luck. What ages it seems since that day at the Pyramids, and how Dot did enjoy herself, to be sure. Poor old Dot, she is getting terribly *blasée* about donkeys and deserts now. But I was forgetting. Tell me all about this evening. Were there many people in the temple? Did you have an *al fresco* concert, *à la* Miss Norton? And how did Jack enjoy the moonlight?"

Elizabeth hesitated. The strange experiences of the evening were still too fresh in her memory for her to be able to listen, without flinching, to these care-

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less comments and questions. Kerr noticed her troubled face, and he came to her rescue without delay.

"No, Mrs Brown," he said, "we had no adventures worth speaking about, and no music. However, if you must know everything, your sister-in-law and I had an argument together. Not a quarrel, of course, but a difference of opinion. It was about that very 'Key of Life,' so, perhaps, you would be willing to give us your opinion on the subject. To judge between us, as it were, and exercise the casting vote."

Rose glanced down at the little charm which she was still holding in her slender hand.

"What was the dispute about?" she inquired. "I'm afraid that my opinion won't be very valuable, for, as you know, I loathe temples and know nothing whatever about Egyptology or hieroglyphics."

"Oh, there's no need to trouble about that," was the reply. "If it comes to Egyptology, neither Miss Cathcart nor I are great authorities. Our little discussion was purely a sentimental one. We disagreed as to the inner and poetical meaning of a 'Key of Life,' that was all. Miss Cathcart declared that, in her opinion, beauty was the clue to everything, and the remedy for all the puzzles and difficulties of the world, while I took a more prosaic view, and decided in favour of duty. Now, Mrs Brown, you shall be the judge, and we will abide by your decree. What is your definition of the 'Key of Life'? What do you consider the best explanation of the phrase?"

Elizabeth began to breathe more freely. She realised that Kerr's intention in making this long speech was to give her time to recover, in a measure,

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from the agitation of the evening, and also to divert both the conversation and her own thoughts from the topics of Jack Feilden and the experiences in the moonlit temple. He had seized hastily upon the first subject that came into his head, but Rose, apparently, was inclined to discuss the question in a more serious spirit.

“What do I think?” she repeated, echoing Kerr’s words, and a soft, dreamy expression came into her dark eyes as she spoke. “I don’t think about it at all, I know. You are both wrong in your definitions, and I should have thought that you, at least, Betty, would have known better. It is love, of course—love that always is and always has been, and always will be, and always must be, the ‘Key of Life.’”

There was a note of assurance and finality in Rose’s words that seemed to admit of no dispute or contradiction. Elizabeth, for her part, felt instinctively that the definition was a correct one, and that the last word on the subject had been spoken.

She glanced up hurriedly, and as she did so, found that Kerr’s blue eyes were fixed on her face, and there was in them, once more, the expression that she had seen there, on that evening, weeks ago now, when they had stood together on the deck of the Nile steamer. The hot colour flamed into her cheeks, and she leaned further back in her seat, for it seemed to her then that everyone must be able to read her secret in her downcast eyes and trembling lips.

Love! love! love! The whole world, surely, was echoing with the word, and yet she, whose career had been dominated by love, to whom its absence or presence had meant everything, in whose life it had, most certainly, been the keynote and ruling power, had talked glibly of Art and Beauty, of lovely scenery,

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brilliant sunshine and clear skies, as if such things could ever be anything more than the accessories and the background to the great facts and realities of life. How absurd she had been, how foolishly dense and superficial.

Elizabeth was conscious, at that moment, of a rush of shame and scorn at the thought of her own blindness, for, surely, with the memory of all her sorrows and experiences to guide her, she ought to have been wiser, and less ready to venture out upon the dangerous ground of such a discussion with the man who loved her, but who, whatever happened, must never guess that she loved him in return.

Rose got up from her seat with a graceful sweep of her black draperies.

"Beauty and duty," she said again, with a little laugh. "I'm afraid that I value Dot's little finger more than all the beauty in the world, and yet, Betty, perhaps, you and Major Kerr were not so very far wrong after all. You know Browning well, of course. Do you remember the lines:

" 'All is beauty,
And knowing this is love, and love is duty' ?

You see, our different definitions come to very much the same thing in the end."

CHAPTER XII

ELIZABETH CATHCART passed many sleepless hours during the night that followed, for she was haunted by vivid memories of the incident that had occurred in the moonlit temple, and Feilden's strange, terrible speech seemed to be still ringing in her ears.

It was as if she could see once more the pathetic, stooping figure of the blind man, standing there in the white glare of the moonlight, with his lined, haggard face and scarred wrists, and she shuddered afresh at the ghastly pictures of suffering and hardship which had been called up by his broken, vehement words.

Heat and cold alternately, thirst and cutting bonds, toil and blows and relentless cruelty. She could almost fancy that she had herself experienced that blazing sun and bitter north wind.

Her heart sank within her at the mere idea of the further revelations of torture and misery that remained hidden away in the recesses of Jack's memory.

Tears smarted in her eyes, and her lips trembled pitifully as she stared into the darkness, trying to force her mind to the realisation of these horrors, and yet, now and again, her thoughts would wander away, in spite of herself, and running through her dreams, like the one bright thread in a rough, dingy fabric, there would come the remembrance of Kerr and of his love.

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She knew instinctively, and without any possibility of doubt, that he had not changed. His feeling for her was as strong and as enduring as ever. It was as strong as her love for him, and that, although he must never know it, was for her the most important thing in the whole world, the "Key of Life," which, while it added immeasurably to her difficulties, yet had power to transform and glorify her existence.

Betty looked very tired and fragile, and there were dark shadows beneath her eyes when she came downstairs the next morning. She was worried as to how she should meet Jack, and for the moment it seemed to her that she was too utterly weary and depressed to be able to face any fresh trouble or exertion.

If only she might have a little rest, a little reprieve, and then, just as these thoughts were passing through her mind, Dot ran up to her in the hall with the news that "Uncle Jack" was still in bed with a bad headache, and that the doctor said that nobody must see or speak to him for hours.

"He's not really ill, Aunt Betty, so it's all right, and you will be able to come for a ride with us, won't you? You did promise that you would come the very first morning that you could, and we are going for the most lovely ride on the other side of Karnak. It will be heavenly, and Major Kerr is coming too. I'll ride with him first, then mother, and, if you like, you shall have him all the way home. Oh, Aunt Betty, dearest, darling Aunt Betty, do please say you will come. I'll go this minute and order Number Twelve for you. He is the best donkey in Luxor, and so frisky. He kicked me off five times—only it was in sand,

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so I didn't mind—when we rode to Medinet Habu last week."

As was usually the case, Dot's speech only came to an end when her breath was entirely exhausted, and then she seized her aunt's hand, and dragged her away towards the dining-room door.

Elizabeth was conscious of a distinct sensation of relief at the tidings that the dreaded interview must, of necessity, be postponed for the present. Jack would be invisible all the morning, and Haynes, doubtless, would be in close attendance on his patient. The longed-for respite had been granted to her, and she would have a few hours at least, in which to consider the difficult question in all its bearings, and decide whether or not Dr Haynes should be informed of what had taken place in the temple.

Elizabeth's common sense told her that the doctor ought to be told, but, at the same time, she could not help shrinking from the publicity which must needs follow the disclosure.

There could not be any doubt that Feilden, if he chose, was capable of giving information which would lead to the discovery of his place of captivity, and also perhaps to the ultimate arrest of his captors. She knew that justice ought to be done and the wrongdoers brought to punishment, but, on the other hand, she was quite positive that Jack had not intended to speak as he had done on the previous evening. A sudden and overpowering impulse had prompted him, and it was possible, and indeed probable, that he already regretted the step which he had taken. Under these circumstances, if he wished to conceal and to forget the past, with all its horrors and miseries, would it not be little

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less than a breach of honour on her part to take it upon herself to divulge the truth?

At one moment Elizabeth felt that duty and justice compelled her to speak, at the next that such speech would be a betrayal of trust and an injury to the blind and helpless victim. Her mind urged her in one direction, her heart in another. She longed to keep silence, and yet realised that it would be well-nigh impossible to do so.

There was, it is true, some comfort in the thought that the decision could hardly rest entirely in her own hands, for she had not been the only witness to that strange, wild scene in the temple.

Kerr knew the truth, he would have to be consulted, and it was a relief to know that she could hardly move in the matter without his assistance or his connivance.

All through the long weary hours of the night Betty had tormented herself with these conflicting thoughts, and she had wondered how it would be possible for her to discuss the question with Major Kerr before her next interview with Feilden should take place.

It was quite likely that the blind man would question her with regard to her intentions, and she knew that it would be useless to refuse to answer. He might even attempt to wring a promise from her to the effect that she would not disclose the truth—a promise which, without further consideration, she was by no means disposed to give, and yet, if she tried to argue with him on the subject, he would, in all probability, work himself up into a condition of dangerous excitement and agitation.

The position was a difficult one, and it had seemed to be impossible to find a way out of the tangle

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of perplexities, but now the news of poor Feilden's illness and Dot's plan for the morning promised a means of escape.

"You shall have Major Kerr all the way home," that was what the child had said, and, surely, in the course of that ride there would be time for her to ask her friend's advice on this new crisis which had arisen.

Betty's heart felt considerably lighter as she ran upstairs to prepare for the expedition, and the news that Feilden's indisposition was really only a bad headache, and nothing serious, served to raise her spirits still further.

It may have been the reaction after the anxiety of the previous day, but she felt that she was tired of trouble and eager for a little change and pleasure. Until the homeward ride nothing could be done, so she determined to forget her worries for the time and enjoy the exquisite Egyptian morning to the full.

Although she had been for nearly six weeks in Luxor, Elizabeth had devoted herself so entirely to Feilden and to plans for his amusement that she had had little time to spare for expeditions on her own account, and this was one of the longest rides that she had yet taken. As they made their way slowly through a large, native village near Karnak, she glanced from side to side eagerly and noticed all the novel details of the scene with keen delight.

The mud-built houses with their flat roofs piled high with fuel and fodder, the crumbling walls and narrow, winding streets. It all seemed to be picturesque and beautiful to her unaccustomed eyes, and she hardly perceived the squalor and

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discomfort that are inseparable from the surroundings of Arab dwelling-places.

There were many palm trees growing in the village, and the soft air seemed to be full of the dry, rustling sound of the moving fronds.

Black and white pigeons circled overhead, piles of green clover at the doors of the low houses made vivid patches of colour, and a string of camels, evil-smelling and uncouth, came swinging past, their huge loads brushing against the walls on either side of the road as they stepped with clumsy daintiness through the thick dust.

In the yellow patches of sunlight groups of gaily-clad children were playing and chattering; a slim little girl stretched out her hand with a sidelong glance and a shy murmur of "baksheesh"; three or four women, with water-pots on their heads, stopped to glance at the strangers from beneath their black veils, and in front of one house a barber was seated busily employed in shaving the head of a client, who crouched in front of him in the warm sand.

Elizabeth had almost forgotten the dislike which she had felt towards the natives on her first arrival in Egypt, and it seldom occurred to her now to associate them with the tragedy which had ruined Feilden's career and had cast such a gloomy shadow over her own life. She was quite sorry when at last, the riders came to the end of the village street and, turning to the left, made their way across several fields in the direction of the river.

Out there in the open the brilliant sunshine was dazzling after the dusky shadow of the thickly-growing palm trees, and the rocky hills on the other side of the Nile seemed to dance and shimmer in

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a wonderful glow of rose colour and orange. It was getting too hot to ride, and before long they halted and turned the heads of their donkeys in the direction of Karnak and Luxor.

It had been Dot's decree that on the homeward journey Betty should have Major Kerr as her companion, but although this programme was strictly carried out, she did not have any opportunity for the consultation with him that she so much desired.

At first it seemed as if everything would be managed quite easily.

Mrs Brown and her little daughter were anxious to secure some photographs in the native village and at Karnak, so they cantered on ahead. Elizabeth was riding more slowly, and Kerr took his place at her side.

"It's a queer thing, Miss Cathcart," he said, "how absolutely you forget things, and then something or another brings them back to your mind. Ever since we rode down to the river bank this place has seemed to be familiar to me, and now suddenly I have remembered all about it. Ten years ago Fielden and I came here one evening, and he made a sketch of that sakkieh and the palm trees behind it. Talk about the unchanging East—why, those buffaloes might be the very same beasts that were here then, with the same boy driving them round and round."

"Poor Jack," said Betty, softly, and she glanced at the scene before her with fresh interest. How well she remembered the little packet of sketches that had been sent home to her after his supposed death, and the passionate love with which she had treasured them. Poor Jack, and now he

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was blind and helpless, and all her love for him was dead.

Kerr's next words seemed to echo Betty's thoughts.

"Poor old Feilden," he said, "it is rough luck for him, to be sure;" and then Elizabeth was on the point of embarking on her subject, when she was interrupted by the clatter of hoofs and the loud shouts of a donkey-boy. A few moments later they were joined by Miss Gladys Norton, who had started out on a solitary ride, and was naturally delighted at the prospect of a little masculine society on her return journey.

She pushed past Betty with scant ceremony, and established herself at Kerr's side.

"Now, this is what I call a piece of luck," she exclaimed. "I only came out for a ride because there was not a single thing to do in the hotel. Everyone is fussing about their fancy dresses for to-night. Luxor really is the dullest place in the world, and, for the matter of that, Egypt altogether is very much over-rated. This deadly sort of life is not in my line at all, and I'm sure, Major Kerr, that you agree with me. Now confess, would not you be glad of anything in the way of excitement or adventure?"

She glanced over her shoulder as she spoke, with her usual arch smile, and a short time afterwards, as if in answer to her words, the adventure came, although, perhaps, it did not take quite the romantic form which Miss Norton would have chosen. Her donkey stumbled on the uneven path, and the young lady, who was not a very skilful rider at the best of times, was thrown with some violence to the ground.

She scrambled to her feet instantly, for she was

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not hurt in the least, but her face was crimson and hot tears of anger were smarting in her eyes. It was an added annoyance that the conceited and detested Miss Cathcart should have witnessed her discomfiture, and even Major Kerr came in for a share of her spleen. She refused his offers of assistance rudely, and declaring that the saddle or stirrup must be at fault, insisted that both should be altered and examined before she would consent to mount her donkey again.

Kerr shrugged his broad shoulders with a little smile of amusement, and leaving the irate young lady to her task of abusing and directing the donkey-boys, he strolled on to where Betty had halted at a short distance from the scene of the disaster.

They had reached the canal by this time, and on the one side was the deep cutting, with its row of dipping shadoofs, while, on the other hand, the fields, vividly green, and intersected with brown raised pathways, stretched away in the direction of the river.

There were thickly-growing clumps of palms here and there in the fields, with native houses half hidden among them.

Some of these mud houses were near to the canal bank, and in an open space of dusty ground a ropemaker was at work. Betty watched him with keen interest in her eyes. He was evidently an old man, but as he stooped over his task, his face was not visible.

The rope was stretched between wooden pegs which had been driven into the earth, and as the worker moved backwards and forwards, he manipulated the rough brown strands deftly with his lean, sinewy fingers.

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It was strange to see him there, working on so unconcernedly, and never pausing for a moment to glance up at the intruders. Kerr and Betty watched him in silence, and they did not perceive that a little throng of women and children had gathered round them, attracted to the spot by Miss Norton's first terrified scream and by her subsequent shrill torrent of lament and abuse.

Had they been more observant they would, perhaps, have noticed that one of the women drew nearer than the others, until she was standing quite close to Kerr. Her veil was drawn carefully half across her face, but there was something that might almost have been a gleam of recognition in her dark eyes as she peered intently at the Englishman from beneath its shadow.

She was a slender, picturesque figure as she stood there with her dingy draperies trailing in the dust, and the heavy water-pot, which she had lowered from her head, at her side. One small henna-stained hand, with a couple of coloured glass bangles on the wrist, was raised to hold together the folds of her veil. Every now and then there could be seen the gleam of a silver trinket on her breast.

Kerr meanwhile, quite unconscious of the attention which he was attracting, stood beside Betty, with his hand on her donkey's bridle.

He had pushed the broad-brimmed, grey felt hat back from his forehead, and in the brilliant noonday light his strong, clear-cut features, and the blue eyes which contrasted so strangely with his sunburnt skin, were plainly visible.

For a moment or two the woman stood there as if immovable, and then she turned quickly, and as if acting on a sudden impulse, ran towards the

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brink of the canal, where there was a thick fringe of grass and clover. She stooped, and with small, dainty fingers gathered a few of the purple vetch flowers that grow among the clover.

The next minute she was back again, her bare feet making no sound on the dusty path, and drawing the shrouding folds of her veil still more closely across her face, she thrust the blossoms gently into Kerr's hand.

He glanced down at the little offering with a puzzled smile.

"Hullo," he said, "what a queer thing. I wonder what made her do that, and why on earth should she single out me for her attentions? She went off like a shot too, and did not even wait for a 'baksheesh.'"

Elizabeth leaned forward in her saddle to try and catch a glimpse of the girl's features as she passed, and then her attention was suddenly arrested by a movement on the part of the old ropemaker.

He had looked up at last, and was staring either at Kerr and Elizabeth, or at the group of native women behind them, with a gaze that had something indescribably horrible and startling in its intensity.

The man's face was, in itself, sufficiently horrible and sinister, for it was wrinkled and lined to an extraordinary extent, there was a glare of ferocity and hatred that was almost like insanity in the red-rimmed eyes, and a long scar that reached from brow to chin, distorted the features and twisted the thin lips into a malevolent grin.

The whole figure, with its stooping attitude and raised, evil face, was suggestive at the same time of

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violence, cunning and unbridled cruelty. One was reminded irresistibly of a savage animal, crouching and alert, and ready at any moment to spring forward upon its prey.

Elizabeth felt a long shudder run through her from head to foot. She turned to Kerr quickly.

"Look at that man," she said. "The ropemaker. Did you ever see such a terrible face?"

Kerr was mounting his donkey as she spoke, and before he had time to answer, or to look in the direction of her pointing finger, they were joined by Miss Norton, whose saddle had at last been arranged to her satisfaction.

It was evident from her first words that the young lady had been an amused witness to the little scene of the native woman and her gift of flowers.

"Upon my word, Major!" she cried, in her loud voice, as she urged her donkey forward. "So you are quite coming out as a lady's man, are you? At last! Really, it was a pretty tableau. You have evidently made a conquest. May I ask whether you have met your admirer before, or was it a case of love at first sight?"

They rode away to the accompaniment of Miss Norton's ringing peals of laughter. It was easy to see that she had made up her mind to monopolise Kerr completely, but he managed to linger for a moment at Betty's side.

"What was it that frightened you, Miss Cathcart?" he asked. "You said something about the old ropemaker, I hope that he did nothing to annoy you."

Elizabeth hastened to reassure him. She was already beginning to feel ashamed of her own tremors, but the scarred evil face of the Arab had

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brought the crystal-gazer's wild prophecies back to her mind.

"It was nothing," she said. "Nothing, really. The man had a horrible expression, and he looked up and stared at me in such a strange way. I almost think that he must have been out of his mind."

"Oh, that is quite possible," was the answer. "The natives, I know, think no end of lunatics, and look upon them as sacred. At least, that is what I have been told. No doubt the old chap was as mad as a hatter, but most likely, quite harmless. I'm sorry, though, that he managed to scare you."

There was no time for any further conversation on that or any other subject, for Miss Norton was only a few yards ahead, and, at this moment, her shrill voice summoned Kerr imperatively to her side.

As the path turned sharply Betty glanced over her shoulder at the group that they had left behind them on the canal bank. Evidently Kerr's explanation of the case had been correct, for the rope-maker had risen to his feet now, and was in the midst of the crowd of women and children. He was shouting and gesticulating, with wild, uncouth movements of his lean, outstretched arms.

A few minutes later they rejoined Rose and Dot, who were waiting under the trees near the village, and then they all galloped on together towards the great entrance of the Karnak temple.

There was, however, another alarm still in store for Elizabeth, and, once again, the mysterious statements of the clairvoyante were destined to be brought back vividly to her mind.

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The riders dismounted, for Dot was anxious to take a photograph in the temple of Ptah—which lies to the north of Karnak, beyond the main block of ruins—and they made their way slowly up the path to the pylon, across the open space and through the cool shadows of the hypostyle court.

Elizabeth had never yet seen the beautiful little temple of Ptah, so when their destination was reached, she left her companions at the entrance, busy with preparations for the photograph, and wandered on alone between the rows of graceful broken columns and into the tiny courtyard beyond.

It was very quiet here, and peaceful, although the sound of Miss Norton's shrill laughter was still audible in the distance, and Betty, glancing round with a long-drawn breath of relief, discovered that she was standing in a small enclosure, the walls of which were covered with hieroglyphics and strange pictures of the old gods and goddesses. On one side was the massive doorway, through which she had come, and opposite to it was the entrance to the inner chambers of the shrine.

In front of the entrance two columns supported a roof which shaded part of the courtyard, and there were three altar-shaped stones in the spaces between the pillars.

Elizabeth walked on slowly and paused on the threshold of the inner shrine. The small chambers into which the interior of the temple is divided, are very dark, and her eyes were dazzled by the sunlight. She leaned forward and peered into the close, dusty gloom.

After a moment or two, when she had grown

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accustomed to the dim, uncertain light, she went on again, only to pause once more with a gasp of sheer amazement and dismay.

She had reached the innermost chamber of the temple, but it almost seemed to her dazed senses as if she were back, once more, in the shabby room of the fortune-teller, and as if the woman's strange, indifferent voice was still sounding in her ears.

"A small dark place with stone walls and a sandy floor. In the middle there is an image—an idol, I suppose—and the image has a face like a cat."

Those were the words that had been spoken on that well-remembered November afternoon, and now Betty found herself standing in the midst of the very scene which the woman had described.

Here was the room, dark and narrow. Under foot was the yellow beaten sand. The stone walls were covered with carved pictures, and before her was the image, a black granite statue of Sekhet, the lion-headed goddess, standing in her shrine, as she had stood through all the years and centuries, with the sun disk above her brow, and the long-stemmed lotus flower of Upper Egypt in her hands.

Elizabeth shivered with a sudden chill of fear and horror, and her hands played nervously with the gold chain at her throat. It was a relief when the sound of voices and approaching footsteps fell on her ears, and, for once, even Gladys Norton's strident tones seemed welcome and reassuring.

Betty was very silent and preoccupied during the ride back to Luxor, for now, in addition to her former anxieties, she was a prey to all sorts of nervous fears and forebodings.

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The memories of the red sunset at Port Said, the ropemaker, and the goddess Sekhet, followed one another in weary procession through her brain, and so real were the pictures that, more than once during the day, she fancied that she actually could see the scarred, horrible face of the Arab lunatic glaring at her out of a crowd of dirty, black-robed natives, or peering with red furtive eyes from beneath the drooping head-covering of one of the quiet seated figures at the hotel gate.

Major Kerr spent the remainder of the day with a friend who was staying at one of the other hotels, so Betty had no opportunity of asking his advice about Feilden, nor of discussing the mad Arab and her strange fancies with regard to him.

CHAPTER XIII

It was not till late in the afternoon that Elizabeth was summoned to Feilden's room, for the headache had proved to be a more serious matter than had been anticipated.

Dr Haynes's face was grave and anxious when he came to tell Betty that his patient was asking for her, and his voice, as he answered her questions, had lost a good deal of its customary hopefulness.

"Yes, I am worried about him. He has had two bad days, and it is difficult to fight against these fits of depression. He is in the blues again, Miss Cathcart, and this time, I fear, it is your fault."

"My fault." Elizabeth echoed the doctor's words in a tremulous whisper. "What can you mean, Dr Haynes? I have been waiting for hours to see Mr Feilden, but you sent down word that he must not be disturbed."

"Oh, it is not that," interposed the other. "I know that nobody could possibly have done more for him than you have, ever since you arrived at Luxor. No, it is about your singing. He was most desirous to hear you, and has often talked to me of your beautiful voice. You remember that only yesterday he asked you to sing and you refused. One can hardly wonder, really, that

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when he heard you singing in the garden this afternoon, he was hurt and annoyed."

Haynes's manner, as he spoke, was stiff and constrained, and there was a note of injury in his voice.

"He heard me singing in the garden! What do you mean, Dr Haynes? I do not understand you in the least."

"I think that I have made my meaning sufficiently clear, Miss Cathcart. It was early this afternoon, and, thinking that Mr Feilden was asleep, I left him alone for a short time. On my return I found him in a most agitated condition. He had been listening to you singing, and, as I have already said, he felt deeply offended that you should consent to sing to other people when you would not gratify his wish. In his present state any excitement is harmful, and I must beg—no, I must insist upon it—that if he asks you to sing to-day, you will comply with his request."

The young man spoke in a decidedly domineering tone, but Betty was too much puzzled and dismayed to take offence.

"It is all a mistake," she said hurriedly, and her eyes were full of tears as she spoke. "I have not been singing this afternoon, I have not sung a note for years. Dr Haynes, surely you must understand that I would give anything to be able to sing to Jack, but I cannot. I was ill—very ill, ten years ago, and since then I have had no voice. Oh, I could not explain yesterday, before everybody, but to-day, if Jack asks me, I will tell him that my voice is gone."

She moved away, but the other stopped her. He was ashamed to find that he had misjudged

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this woman, and in his eagerness to make amends all his usual self-importance and formality was forgotten.

"Miss Cathcart," he said, and his face reddened boyishly, "what a fool you must have thought me, and an impertinent fool too, but Feilden was so cocksure about it all. And look here, if he asks you to sing, make some excuse, but don't let him know that your voice is gone. He will have to know some day, of course, but just now, until he has picked up his strength a little, I don't want him to be worried about anything."

Betty acquiesced with a little nod, and then went on to Feilden's room. The doctor's face grew grave and troubled again as he looked after her.

"So it was all a delusion," he mused, "that long story about the singer in the garden, and Feilden was so certain that it had been Miss Cathcart herself. The poor fellow's mind must be seriously affected, there can be no doubt about that now." Haynes began to consider the easiest means of travel, and he determined to get his patient back to England, if possible, without delay.

Elizabeth meanwhile, as she had been led to expect, found that Jack was both depressed and irritable. He was sitting in his usual place at the open window. He did not move as she entered the room, and it struck her that there was something utterly despondent in his whole attitude and appearance. The feathery fronds of the palm tree in the garden outside, made a shifting background to the grey head and hopeless, stooping figure.

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Betty paused for a moment and watched Feilden with soft, pitiful eyes, then she came forward and laid her hand on the bowed shoulder.

"Here I am, Jack," she said. "I am so glad that you are better, and that I may come to you at last."

Feilden shook her hand from his shoulder roughly, and there was impatience and annoyance too in his husky voice as he answered, "I'm not better; who says that I am better? How should I be, when you go away and leave me like this? Oh, I've no doubt that you've managed to enjoy yourself and have had a jolly day enough. You are cruel to me, yes, it is true, and you never used to be cruel in the old days. Do you suppose that I did not hear you singing this afternoon?"—he turned upon her with sudden anger—"and when I asked you to sing to me you refused—only yesterday."

His voice rose shrilly on the last words, and his fingers twitched with excitement.

"It was the old song, too, that you were singing," he went on. "The song that we used to sing together, ages ago. How could you do it? How could you? If I had not heard with my own ears I would not have believed that you could be so cruel."

"No, Jack, no, dear, it was a mistake—all a mistake." With the doctor's words still sounding in her ears, Betty did not know how to soothe or reassure him. She tried to take his hand, but it was dragged away.

"You may say 'no,' but I say 'yes, yes,'" the blind man asserted with renewed passion. "And it is absurd and ridiculous of you to contradict me. You were singing the 'Skye Boat Song.' Do you think that I have forgotten it? Or that

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I could ever mistake your voice? Do you think that I should forget any word or note that I have heard you sing? "

He stopped for a moment, as if out of breath, and then leaning forward in his chair, and with his sightless face turned towards her, he sang in a strange, faraway whisper, that was like the shadowy ghost of his old ringing voice, the plaintive lines that Betty, as well as he himself, remembered so well.

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye."

"No, Jack, no," Betty whispered again, but the other did not seem to hear her.

"Your voice is not quite so good as it used to be. Perhaps you have not practised much, but what does that matter? Sing to me now, Betty dear, sing to me now, at once, and then I shall know that you did not mean to be unkind."

Elizabeth was in despair. The sense of utter helplessness was terrible to her, and she felt as if she were caught in a trap from which no escape was possible. She could not comply with Jack's request. Her voice was gone, not a vestige of its old strength and beauty remained. It was impossible for her to sing, and Haynes had forbidden her to excite Feilden, or to explain to him the reason for her refusal. She got up from her low seat at Jack's side, and moving to the open window, leaned against its frame and stood looking out at the palm branches and the rosy evening sky beyond.

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?"

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How the quaint, haunting words brought back the old days and all that those old days had meant to her. She seemed to be sitting once more in the twilight on the terrace of the Manor House.

The air was full of summer scents and summer sounds. A nightingale carolled madly in the bushes beyond the rose-garden, and her brother George, with his banjo on his knee, was strumming an accompaniment to Jack's voice.

"Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye."

The vision of the past faded away. Instead of the spreading beeches there were palm trees, instead of the nightingale an owl hooted in the distance. George was dead, and Jack, surely he must be dead too, for it could not be possible that he had really changed into this haggard, grey-haired man, whose hand was groping feebly towards her, and whose weak, irritable voice was reproaching her again.

"You are unkind to me, Betty, but not so cruel as that man Haynes. He is a villain; you may not know it, but I know, and he cannot take me in. He is a villain, I tell you. A blackguard through and through, and he means to do me a mischief if he gets the chance."

Feilden's words amazed and bewildered his listener completely. He had, it appeared, forgotten in a moment all about her singing and his fancied grievance, and there was something unnatural and alarming in this sudden change of mood. It dismayed Betty almost as much as did the expression of mingled fear and cunning that was slowly dawning in the speaker's face.

"He is watching me, Betty, he is always watching

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me, day and night. I know it, I feel it, although I cannot see. It is horrible—beastly—to be watched like that, when you are blind and cannot watch too. Betty, your eyes are all right, you can see. Look, look, over there, tell me, is he watching me now? I seem to feel his hateful eyes staring at me, staring out of the darkness—and I cannot see.”

Elizabeth shuddered from head to foot. Jack’s voice had sunk to a whisper. One of his thin hands was clutching her arm; with the other he pointed to the furthest corner of the dusky room. His head craned forward, as if he were trying to pierce the gathering twilight with his sightless eyes.

“He is watching me,” he repeated again. “Always watching—and I cannot see.”

The woman’s gaze followed the direction of that pointing finger with a strange, shrinking nervousness, for the man’s words and gestures were so convincing that it was almost impossible not to believe that some mysterious danger was really lurking close at hand. As she peered into the dusky corner with dilated eyes, the fears and presentiments to which she had been a prey in the morning crowded around her with renewed force, and it seemed to her that she could see the horrible, distorted face of the ropemaker glaring back at her out of the darkness.

“It’s all right, Jack dear.” She gave a little laugh and tried to speak naturally, although her voice faltered and her hands felt cold and trembling. “There is no one here but me, and there’s nothing to be afraid of, nothing—nothing.”

It was not until half an hour later that Dr Haynes returned to his patient, and then Betty, with a

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murmured farewell to Jack, left him, and walked slowly and wearily upstairs to her own room.

She was feeling exhausted and despondent, for the strain of the interview had been almost unbearable. Every moment she had been expecting that he would speak of what had taken place in the temple on the previous evening, or that he would again wring her heart with petitions that she should sing or reproaches for her cruelty in refusing his request.

Much to her surprise, however, both these fears had proved to be groundless. Jack neither referred a second time to her singing nor did he make any mention of the revelations as to his captivity and sufferings; but still this very fact, although it was in itself a relief, yet, at the same time, filled her with fear and misgiving.

There was, surely, something that was unnatural and alarming in his strange forgetfulness, and the remembrance of Haynes's serious words and worried face did not reassure her.

What was it that the doctor feared? What new development did he anticipate? Betty asked herself these questions, but she would not let her mind dwell on the possible answer. Jack would, doubtless, be better to-morrow. He had often had these fits of depression before, and yet—and yet— Her brain seemed to be revolving in a weary circle of conjectures and explanations, of hopes and fears; there seemed to be nothing but black clouds of mystery and foreboding on every side, and out of the darkness stared the fierce, red-rimmed eyes of the rope-maker, and the clairvoyante's husky voice whispered its strange warnings into her unwilling ears.

In the wide corridor outside their rooms Eliza-

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beth encountered Mrs Brown, and the latter stopped, with an exclamation of horror, as she caught sight of her sister-in-law's wan cheeks and heavy eyes.

"My dear Betty, what have you been doing with yourself? Why, you look half dead, you do indeed. You must go to your room this minute and not think of coming down again to-night. I will send you up some dinner, a little soup, or something of that sort, and, if you take my advice, you will go straight to bed and have a good night's rest."

Rose slipped her hand into Betty's arm and led her gently to her room, and the other, far too weary to resist, acquiesced without demur in these plans for her comfort and welfare.

She had a headache. Yes, perhaps, as Rose said, the sun had been a little hot this morning, and then she was worried about Jack. No, he was not really ill, only low-spirited and out of sorts. Probably he would be all right in the morning, and she, Betty, would be all right too. A rest was what she wanted, and she would go to bed instead of coming down to dinner.

"Well, good-night, dear," were Rose's last words. "I won't keep you now, and you shan't be disturbed. Have you anything to read? Some newspapers and magazines have come to-day. I will send Dot to you with them in five minutes."

When the door had closed behind her sister-in-law Betty threw herself down into a low chair with a sigh of relief. She was only too glad to follow Mrs Brown's advice, for she was feeling nervous and unstrung, and the prospect of the lonely, restful evening was most welcome.

Besides this there was to be the fancy ball that

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night, the ball that was to be the principal event of the Luxor season, and she had dreaded lest Rose should insist upon her taking part in the festivities.

Up till a few days ago, indeed, Feilden had declared that both he himself and his beautiful *fiancée* would be present at the dance, and he had openly boasted that Betty would be the belle of the evening; but now poor Jack's presence was out of the question, and as to Betty, she felt that the mere idea of decking herself in the dainty costume that had been prepared for her, and of pretending to be gay and light-hearted, was unbearable.

She leaned out of the window and let the soft wind play upon her hot forehead, gathering comfort from the thought that, at all events, there were twelve hours or more of peace and silence in front of her. The day was over at last, and all her premonitions that it was destined to be a day of danger and misfortune had come to nothing. She could afford to laugh now at the crystal-gazer's fantastic prophecies, and to push the thoughts of the goddess Sekhet, and of the Arab's scarred, hideous face, away into the background of her mind.

A door slammed loudly in the distance; there was a quick patter of hurrying footsteps, and then Dot, with her arms full of newspapers and magazines, burst noisily into the room.

"Here they are, darling—*Pall Mall*, *Pearson*, and four *Daily Mails*. I'm so sorry you've got a headache. Perhaps you caught it from Uncle Jack, like I did measles from Nellie Parkes in Bombay. And you won't see me at the fancy ball this evening. What a pity! Mother has made me a wand with a star at the top, and there's another star—a big

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one—to go in my hair. I'm going to have a fan, I am, and Nurse is sewing silver buckles on to my shoes.”

She flung her load down on to the table and cast herself, with her usual vehemence, into Betty's arms.

Rose had enjoined her little daughter to be very quiet and not to disturb Elizabeth with her chatter, but these instructions were speedily forgotten, and the idea that either her presence or her conversation might be unwelcome, had never entered Dot's head.

She settled herself comfortably on Betty's lap, and embarked upon a long account of the past day, which had been, it appeared, even apart from the morning's ride, full of surprising adventure and incident.

As she talked the restless little fingers played with the long gold chain, and it was not long before there came a sudden pause in the middle of a description of the evening's walk.

“Oh, Aunt Betty, look. Do look. You've lost your little blue 'Key of Life.'”

Elizabeth's hands flew to her chain with an exclamation of dismay.

“My 'Key of Life,'” she echoed. “No, I can't have lost it. It must be here. Oh, Dot, Dot, what shall I do?”

She had risen to her feet now, and her eager fingers had searched the length of the empty chain.

It was gone. There could be no doubt that it was gone. The broken ring from which it had been suspended was there to tell the tale, and as Betty racked her memory in efforts to recollect when she had last noticed the trinket, the conviction was

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borne in upon her mind that she had not seen it all the afternoon, and that it must have been lost during the morning's ride.

Her "Key of Life," her mascot, the present which Kerr had given to her. At that first moment, and in her over-wrought, nervous condition, the loss seemed to be an unbearable one. She wrung her hands together piteously, and the tears brimmed in her eyes and followed one another slowly down her cheeks.

"It is lost," she whispered, and her voice quivered on the words. "It is lost, and I shall never see it again."

Little Dot was quite overcome with grief at her aunt's distress, and she was eager in her offers of help and sympathy.

"We'll look everywhere, dearest, I'll go to Karnak first thing to-morrow and hunt. You mustn't be afraid; it's certain to be all right, and, if we can't find it, the man at the shop by the river has heaps more 'Keys,' nice clean ones, and they're ten piastres each. I've got two piastres now, Aunt Betty, and I know mother will give me the other eight. I'll go to the shop, I will truly, and buy you a lovely new 'Key of Life.'"

Elizabeth turned upon the child impatiently, and there was a ring of passion in her voice.

"Oh, Dot," she cried, "how can you be so silly? What would be the good of a new one? Can't you understand? It is my own 'Key' that I want—my own, for I loved it better than anything in the whole world."

She paced restlessly about the room, the empty chain still clasped in her hand, and Dot stood watching her in awed amazement. Such agitation

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in a grown-up person was strange and alarming, and, in addition, her feelings were hurt by the repulse which her well-meant offers of assistance had encountered.

Her lip quivered, and she fumbled in her pocket for her small handkerchief.

Betty caught sight of the pathetic face, and, in a moment, her mood changed completely. She threw herself down on her knees and clasped the slender little body in her arms.

"It's all right, Dottie," she said. "I'm silly and tired, dear, but I did not mean to be unkind. We'll go to the shop to-morrow and buy a new 'Key of Life,' and you must forget all about the old one this very minute."

When Dot, with a very serious face, and with her head full of new ideas and new intentions, had taken her departure, Elizabeth still wandered nervously up and down her room.

All the quiet and restfulness of the evening seemed to have been dispelled, and the prospect of the long, lonely hours had suddenly become distasteful. She told herself that the loss of her mascot was a bad omen, and that, doubtless, fresh misfortune was in store.

She thought of the strange panic that had come over her in the temple of Ptah; she thought of the ropemaker and of the clairvoyante, until, at last, her uneasy fears gained the mastery, and the solitude and confinement of her room seemed insupportable.

She picked up a lace scarf, and twisting it round her head went downstairs, across the hall, and out on to the cool verandah.

It was nearly half-past six and quite dark. Most

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of the inhabitants of the hotel were in their rooms, making elaborate toilettes for the fancy ball, and the whole place seemed to be deserted.

Betty seated herself in a low chair and leaned back, looking out at the dusky garden. The space and cool freshness were beginning to soothe her again, but she was not destined to be left in peace for long. After about five minutes there was the rustle of dresses on the stone floor, and Miss Norton and Mabel Gale came out of the hotel arm-in-arm.

The former young lady was talking loudly in her shrill, high-pitched voice, and it was evident that she was in an excessively bad temper.

"It's simply disgraceful. An insult to us all, and, in my opinion, he ought to be ashamed of himself. To go for a walk at this time of the evening, and to Karnak, of all places in the world. I saw him start, and asked him where on earth he was going to, and whether he meant to be back in time for the ball. He said he was going for a walk. Did you ever hear such a thing? A walk. Hullo, Miss Cathcart, is that you? I suppose you mean to come to the dance—or are you going to follow Major Kerr's example and cry off? I call it a beastly shame of him, when there are not nearly enough men to go round as it is."

Elizabeth had risen to her feet as the girls approached, and she stood in front of them now, looking like a tall, white shadow in the gathering darkness.

"No," she said quietly, "I'm afraid that I shall not be able to come either. Mr Feilden is ill this evening, we are very anxious about him. I hope that the ball will be a great success."

She re-entered the hotel and made her way slowly

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back to her own room. Her uneasiness had increased again, and she wondered why Major Kerr should have chosen this evening for his walk to Karnak.

Upon this point she was not left in doubt for very long. She had hardly re-seated herself and picked up one of the magazines when the door was flung open once more, and Dot, in a dainty, fairy costume, and with her spirits quite restored, bounded into the room.

"Here I am, Aunt Betty," she cried. "Did you ever see such a lovely dress? Look at my wand, and the little wings with stars. Now I must go, for I promised faithfully that I'd show myself to Dr Haynes before dinner."

She was half across the room again on her way to the door, when she stopped, as if struck by a sudden thought, and came back hastily to Betty's side.

"I've got something to tell you, darling. It's a secret, but I must tell you. I really, truly must, and I know you will be most awfully pleased."

She climbed up on to Elizabeth's knee as she spoke, rather to the detriment of the gauzy wings, and lowered her eager voice to a mysterious whisper.

"How would you like to have your 'Key of Life' back again, Aunt Betty? The real one, not a nasty new one from the shop. Well, you shall have it back, dear, you shall, the very first thing to-morrow."

The colour flushed back into Betty's cheeks, and her eyes brightened as if by magic.

"What do you mean, Dot? Have you found it? Oh, Dot, have you really found it again?"

Dot shook her head gravely.

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"No, not yet," she explained. "But it will be found very soon. Yes, it's quite certain sure to be found. He did tell me not to say, but you have guessed nearly all the secret, and I simply must tell you the rest. It's Major Kerr, Aunt Betty. I went and told him all about it, and he said he'd go right off to Karnak and try to find it."

"To Karnak!" Betty echoed the words, but Dot's story was not yet finished, and she was far too much excited to notice the change in her aunt's face and manner.

"Yes, he has started off already, and I told him something else too. I remembered—all by myself I remembered—that I saw you holding the little 'Key' when we were in the dark room with the stone cat. You know, Aunt Betty, the big black lady with the cat's head. I was rather frightened in there, and you looked frightened too—you did really, and you were holding the little 'Key' in your hands. I'm sure it was there that you lost it, and Major Kerr promised me he would go and see."

"And he has gone, Dot? You are quite sure that he has gone already?"

"Quite positive, certain sure, darling, and now, good-night; I really must go. Dr Haynes will be waiting, and it's getting most frightfully late."

Dot embraced her aunt fervently and ran away. The broken promise of secrecy was beginning to weigh upon her mind, and she was, besides, rather dismayed at the manner in which her tidings had been received.

Aunt Betty did not seem to be quite so much delighted as might have been expected, and a touch of that same fear which the child had noticed that

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morning in the temple of Ptah, had stolen back into the beautiful eyes.

“Good-night, dearest Aunt Betty, good-night.” Dot paused on the threshold of the room to repeat her farewell, and then the door slammed behind her noisily and Elizabeth was alone.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR several moments after Dot had left her Elizabeth stood motionless and silent with her breath coming in quick, uneven gasps, and with her hands pressed convulsively to her heart.

She was trying to realise the full import of the news which the child had brought, and to adjust her thoughts to cope with this entirely unexpected turn of events.

Kerr had gone to Karnak. He had gone there in search of the lost amulet—on her behalf. Those were the facts of the case, simple and unalarming enough in themselves, and yet, to her, full of a terrible significance.

With the remembrance of the clairvoyante's prophetic words, and with her own fears crowding round her again, they were sufficient to whiten poor Betty's cheeks to a ghastly pallor, and to set her heart beating in wild, suffocating throbs.

Kerr had gone to the temple of Ptah. He, the man whom she loved, the man with the blue eyes, had gone there, in search of something, and there, in the dark chamber, where the image of the lion-headed goddess stood, danger, actual and yet mysterious, awaited him.

Betty did not pause now to question the power of the fortune-teller or the truth of her vision. She was positive that the peril existed, although in what form she could not conjecture, and she knew

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that something must be done at once to avert the danger, or, if that were impossible, to warn Kerr of its approach.

It only remained then to determine in what manner the assistance should be sent, but, at this point, Betty's common sense stepped in and one plan after another was considered and put on one side.

It would be useless and absurd, she realised, to think of rousing the hotel and insisting that a rescue party should be despatched to Karnak. Such a suggestion must only meet with amazement and ridicule, for she had no plausible reason to give for her alarm.

It would also be useless, without long and elaborate explanations, to attempt to make anyone see the affair from her own standpoint; and then, even if her arguments and persuasions should prevail in the end, many valuable—perhaps invaluable—minutes would necessarily be wasted in the meantime.

Supposing too that, after all, her suspicions should prove to be groundless. Elizabeth reared her small head proudly as she pictured Kerr's disgust and astonishment at finding himself the object of so much solicitude, and the amused laughter and endless questionings of which she herself would be the victim.

The idea of taking Rose into her confidence flashed across her mind, but this was almost instantly dismissed.

She remembered clearly her sister-in-law's hysterical panic on the occasion of the visit to the fortune-teller, and the condition of nervous terror into which she had been thrown as the strange

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pictures of the future were, one by one, revealed to them.

No, Rose would, in all probability, be quite useless in the present emergency, and then the realisation was forced upon Elizabeth that she must perforce take the management of the affair upon herself and depend entirely upon her own tact, her skill and her presence of mind to carry it to a successful conclusion.

As soon as she had finally decided this point, and had determined that it would be useless to look for outside help in the matter, all her habitual calm and self-possession returned to her, and the restlessness and nervous tremors to which she had been a prey since the morning, disappeared as if by magic.

While the threatened danger had been only vague and shadowy it had seemed far more terrible than now when it was beginning to assume a definite form. Every moment, as the peril which awaited Kerr became actual and portentous in Elizabeth's mind, so her courage and self-confidence rose to meet it.

She would go at once to Karnak and ascertain for herself if anything was amiss. That, it seemed to her, was the only sensible and, indeed, the only possible course to take. For a minute she stood thinking it over and bracing up her thoughts and faculties to deal with this new crisis, and then she set about her preparations with a speed and a cool determination that was surprising even to herself.

She was delayed for a few moments, it is true, when old Nurse appeared at her door with a dainty supper-tray in her hands, and with many loud exclamations of dismay at finding that her mistress

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was not yet in bed; but happily Dot's wand had been mislaid, and as Nurse was needed to assist in the search for it, Betty managed to get rid of the old servant without much difficulty.

"Yes, Nurse, I'm all right," she repeated again and again. "I am ever so much better, and this soup will be delicious. There is nothing more that you can do—nothing, dear, so go away at once, and don't let anyone come near me again to-night."

Nurse retired, after many parting admonitions, and returned to Mrs Brown with the news that her mistress was much better and did not want to be disturbed. A little while later, Elizabeth, attired in her short riding dress, and with a thick veil muffled round her head and shoulders, opened the door of her room, stole quietly downstairs, and made her way towards the side-door that leads out into the garden.

The hall presented quite a brilliant spectacle as she glanced in its direction, for most of the merry-makers, in their gaily-coloured fancy dresses, were already assembled there.

Rose Brown, bewitching in brocade, powder and patches, was talking to a dignified Arab sheik. Dot's silvery wings and short spangled frock seemed to be everywhere at once. Mabel Gale was demure and charming as a Puritan lady, while Miss Norton, who had by no means recovered from her fit of bad temper, made a handsome and most realistic Carmen.

When Betty slipped past unnoticed behind a group of inquisitive lady's-maids, who were watching the festivities from the background, she felt as if she were some alien visitor from another planet.

Her errand, surrounded as it was with its hazy

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cloud of mystery and supernaturalism, showed incongruous against the setting of this gay, animated scene, as out of place, indeed, as did her short tweed coat and skirt among the brilliant, fanciful costumes of the laughing, chattering throng.

For a moment Elizabeth hesitated. How all these people, her companions and friends, would smile if they could guess at the nature of the quest upon which she was setting out. Surely she was, after all, nothing more nor less than a fool for her pains, the ridiculous, romantic victim of a superstitious impulse.

She had already half turned in the direction of her own room when the memory of the strange happenings of the day rushed back into her mind.

It could not be only chance and coincidence. There must surely be some meaning in the repeated warnings and in her own uneasy premonitions of evil. Supposing that Kerr were now, at this moment, in that narrow, dark chamber with the threatening danger close at hand? Would she ever be able to forgive herself if harm—which she might have prevented—were to overtake him?

This last reflection served to decide her completely, and moving away quickly, she hurried down the passage and out into the garden.

It seemed to Elizabeth that evening that all her faculties and powers were extraordinarily keen and alert. Her weariness and languor had evaporated, and she was able to concentrate her whole thought upon the one subject of Kerr's peril and the steps which must be taken to ensure his safety.

She remembered that after the morning's ride, she had told her donkey-boy to be at the entrance gate at seven o'clock in order that she might give

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him his orders for the following day, and now she walked quickly down the path, summoned Achmed, and told him, in short and concise words, that she was going for a ride to Karnak, and that she wanted the donkey to be brought to the gate at once.

The boy nodded his head and ran away to obey her behest. He was a quiet, rather stolid little fellow, who could not speak much English, and he apparently saw nothing very strange or out of the common in his mistress's orders.

The lady wished to go to Karnak. There would be a moon to-night. It was all perfectly natural, and part of the day's work. To be sure, the moon would not rise for some hours yet, but that was of no consequence. It would only mean that the expedition would take a long time, and the lady was a kind one, pleasant to serve, and liberal in the all-important matter of baksheesh.

A few minutes later Elizabeth was mounted on her donkey, and with Achmed in the rear, was cantering quickly down the village street.

It was past seven now, and quite dark, but the scene in the native town as she rode along was picturesque and interesting.

The tall houses rose on either side, black and sombre against the sky. Only now and then was there the flicker of a light in an upper window, but below, on the level of the dusty road, there was no lack of life and vivid colour.

Buyers and sellers were engaged in vehement discussion as they examined and appraised the goods displayed in the shops. Dark grimy hands examined and turned over the merchandise, and the warm air was full of the clamour of harsh voices,

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the smell of cooking food, and the dust that was churned up by the bare feet of the pushing throng.

Here was a shoemaker's shop, the rows of shoes hanging in rows on the white-washed walls and making a blaze of scarlet and yellow colour, and in the middle the shoemaker was deftly cutting a great skin of crimson leather, that was spread out on the low table in front of him. Further on there was a seller of tin-ware, and beyond that again a butcher's stall, where unappetising joints of meat were displayed in tempting profusion.

A woman, with a brown naked child in her arms, dawdled past, trailing her long dingy skirts in the dust, and then, with loud shouts and the clatter of hoofs, a couple of donkey-boys galloped down the road.

As the street narrowed towards the outskirts of the town the shops became more primitive in their character and in the quality of the wares that were exposed for sale.

On the ground in front of the mud-built houses numbers of children were seated selling fruit and vegetables. Round baskets of oranges were placed in front of them, and tomatoes, green-stemmed onions and bunches of carrots and white radishes were heaped up in great gaudy piles.

At the sides of these improvised stalls tin lanterns were slung on poles, and the light flickered fitfully on the bright hues of the wares and on the eager faces and glistening dark eyes of their vendors.

Elizabeth had never before seen the village under this aspect, and, at any other time, she would have been enraptured at the quaint scenes and the new pictures that met her eyes at every turn. The barbaric brilliance of the colouring and the violent

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contrasts of light and shadow would have delighted her, but this evening, absorbed as she was in her one purpose, she had no attention nor interest to spare for new sights and new effects.

The animated groups, the chattering boys and the tiny children that ran heedlessly across her path, only served to disturb and irritate her, and she breathed more freely when, at last, the town of Luxor was left behind and they were out on the road that leads to the temple of Khons and the great ruined pile of Karnak beyond.

"Quicker, Achmed, quicker," she cried again and again, and the boy pressed forward obediently and urged his donkey along the road.

The lady's mood this evening surprised him, it is true, for, as a rule, she was gentle and considerate and would not allow him to use his stick or follow her too closely, but to-night she seemed to be a different being.

It was dark now that they were beyond the lights of the town, and the way was very rough and uneven, but Betty, filled as she was with mingled excitement and anxiety, pushed on recklessly. The bridge was passed before long, the walls of the cemetery were skirted, and then the donkeys' hoofs thudded softly on the thick dust of the track that leads between the old avenue of sphinxes and up to the graceful gateway of the temple.

The boy had fallen far behind now, panting and out of breath, but the Englishwoman galloped on fearlessly. A wild exhilaration had taken possession of her, fanned into being by the breath of the desert wind that was blowing in her face, and all her fears were for the moment forgotten. She felt as if no being, either human or supernatural,

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could have power to terrify or harm her, and in the strength of this new courage, she found herself almost hoping that her presentiments would be fulfilled and that she should find some real, actual danger to be confronted and conquered in the dark, mysterious ruins towards which her eager face was set.

On she went, on and on, urging her willing little animal forward with rein and hand. She could see dimly the huddle of mud-built hovels on either side of the way. Here and there a glimmer of light showed in a low doorway. The swishing murmur of the palm fronds could be heard, and the incessant cries of the watch-dogs, rising and falling in mournful cadence, echoed and re-echoed from the distance.

The great gateway of the temple towered up suddenly in front of her, black and massive against the starlit sky. She swerved sharply to the right, the donkey's hoofs clattering on the loose stones of the narrow path, and when, a few minutes later, Achmed, breathless and panting, made his appearance she had already dismounted and was awaiting him impatiently with her ticket of admittance to the temple ready in her hand.

"You will stay here, Achmed, until I come back, I shall not be long," she said hurriedly, and then, without waiting for an answer, she left him, and ran up the slope that leads to the pylon.

The guardian swung back the gate and glanced at her ticket carelessly. He also seemed to find nothing unusual in her appearance at this late hour, and, if he had considered the question at all, it would have been to suppose that the rest of her party had lingered behind and would soon make their appearance on the scene.

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The door swung behind her with a creak, and Elizabeth hurried on, passed the second pylon, and entered the gloom and mystery of the great hall of columns beyond.

And here, once again, she hesitated, and glanced over her shoulder, as if doubtful whether she should turn back now, at the eleventh hour, or push forward on her quest. She had been brave and confident enough a little while ago, but now in the silence and utter loneliness of that vast hall, her courage seemed to desert her completely. The fears and premonitions of disaster returned once more with renewed force, and she was frightened, terrified, as perhaps she had never been before in all the twenty-eight years of her life.

A chill settled at her heart, so deadly as almost to check its beating, and long shudders shook her from head to foot.

There was room for any number of lurking forms behind those huge columns which surrounded her on every side. She could almost fancy that she really saw strange, ungainly shapes gliding from one hiding-place to another. Horrible faces peered and grinned at her out of the thick shadows, and the silence seemed to be full of echoing sounds.

Elizabeth clasped her hands together convulsively as she stood there at the foot of one of the great pillars with parted lips and dilated eyes, and when an owl hooted suddenly, from the summit of the broken wall, it was only with difficulty that she repressed a cry of sheer terror.

But this paroxysm of fear did not last for very long. She remembered her reason for being in this place, Kerr's possible danger and the precious moments that she was wasting so recklessly.

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Then she set her teeth with renewed determination, and groped her way slowly, from column to column, until she was outside the hypostyle court and there was nothing but the stretch of stony, thorn-grown ground between her and her destination.

Once out in the open again, and away from the gloom and mystery of the great temple, Betty pressed forward quickly, but everything seemed to unite together with malevolent purpose to impede her progress.

The stones and hollows in the uneven path made her trip and stumble again and again. Once she twisted her ankle between two blocks of masonry and fell heavily to the ground, and the thorn bushes pricked her and caught at her dress as she ran.

When, at last, she reached the temple of Ptah she was panting and exhausted, but she still pressed onward, her footsteps making no sound on the smooth sand, until she was standing in the inner courtyard where the two pillars support the low roof above the three altar stones.

Elizabeth stopped for a moment, leaning against one of the stones, and then, when she had recovered her breath a little, she moved on a step or two, and peered through the close-set bars of the wooden gate that bars the entrance to the dark chambers of the shrine.

At first it seemed as if the whole place were deserted, and she began to breath more freely as she told herself that, after all, the haste, and, indeed, the errand itself, had been unnecessary.

Kerr was not here, probably he was already far on his homeward walk to Luxor. There was no danger, no need for further dread and anxiety.

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She had been foolish, there could be no doubt about that now, ridiculously childish and superstitious. Perhaps some day, in the future, she would be able to laugh at the remembrance of her presentiments and her wild expedition to Karnak; now, there was nothing for her to do but to retrace her steps and to acknowledge that she had only herself to blame for her fatigue and discomfiture.

Betty felt ashamed and humiliated at the thought of her own folly, and a vague sense of disappointment was mingled with her relief at the realisation that, after all, her quest had not been justified by its results.

It was dark and silent there in the lonely little temple. There had been no sign of the black-robed guardian, and the first of the wooden gates had been standing wide open.

Elizabeth had not noticed these details as she hurried along the avenue of close-set pillars that leads up to the shrine. She had been intent only on the one idea of Kerr's peril, but now that his safety was assured the intense silence and solitude began to oppress her. She half turned in the direction of the doorway that leads away from the inner court, and then paused, and, as if moved by a sudden impulse, pressed her face against the upright bars of the gate, and strained her eyes in a vain effort to pierce the thick darkness in which the inner rooms were shrouded.

The barred door opened directly into the central chamber of the three in which the interior of the temple is divided, and near to it—at right angles—another doorway leads into a second stone-walled apartment. It is in this second room that the image of the goddess Sekhet is placed.

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Had it been daylight Elizabeth would have been able to see into this second chamber from her position at the door, but the statue itself would have been hidden from her view.

Suddenly, as she stood there making that last ineffectual attempt to pierce the gloom, she heard a faint sound coming from within the shrine. There was the tiny noise of a grating scratch—the scrape of a match being rubbed against stone—and then a faint radiance illuminated the darkness. For a second she caught a glimpse of a man—of Kerr himself—kneeling on the ground and bending forward.

In one hand he held the match, she could see his face distinctly in its light, and with the other he groped in the dry sand of which the floor of the chamber is composed.

So he was here after all. In the shrine of the stone goddess, searching for the lost amulet, and intent only on the task that he had undertaken for her sake. Betty watched him eagerly until the match burned out in his fingers, and then there was another period of darkness, in which, however, by listening with eager ears, she could now distinguish the sound of the sifting sand as he let it run through his searching hands. Again a match was struck, again the little light flickered, and again she had that brief vision of the face of the man she loved.

It was evident that Kerr had only a few matches with him, for he used them sparingly. It was evident, too, that he had no intention of abandoning the search until every inch of the sandy floor had been examined.

Betty still lingered outside the gate watching,

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and a tender, happy smile curved her lips. She must go in a minute now and make her way back alone to Luxor, for nothing would have induced her to let him know that she had followed him to Karnak and spied, unbidden, upon his movements.

The assurance of his safety was all that had mattered, and on that point her mind was at rest. She would go now—yes, in another moment. One more match should be struck, she would wait for that; she must wait to catch one more glimpse of his face, and then she would go.

Only that evening Elizabeth had declared that the "Key of Life," the lost mascot, was the dearest thing in the world, but now, as she leaned against the stone jamb of the doorway and gazed into the darkness, waiting for one more sight of Bertram Kerr's face, she realised that she prized even more highly the love and devotion of this man who would give himself so much trouble to do her a trifling service.

Once more the scrape of a match broke the silence, but now Kerr had moved his position. His back was towards her as he knelt, and only the silhouette of his dark, close-cropped head was visible. Betty pressed her cheek against the gate, so that she might see more clearly through the bars, and then something else caught her eyes, and the blood seemed to ebb away from her heart, leaving her dumb and motionless with horror and amazement.

A hand and wrist were outlined distinctly against the faintly-illuminated doorway of the inner room, and in the hand there was clutched a long, pointed knife.

There was someone standing between her and Kerr. Someone was lurking in the central chamber,

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creeping slowly forward, and ready, in another moment, to spring with murderous swiftness upon the unsuspecting and defenceless man.

Expectant as she had been of disaster, and prepared in a measure, Elizabeth realised what was happening in a flash, but none the less she was at first completely paralysed and incapable of movement.

Then the match flickered and went out, and in that same moment the woman's powers seemed to return to her, and she tore wildly at the intervening bars.

"Take care!" she cried, and her voice sounded hoarse and unfamiliar, like the voice of a complete stranger. "Take care, Major Kerr! Take care, take care!"

There was the sound of a swift, forward rush in the thick, close darkness, the clamour of a loud, unnatural voice. Kerr's voice, too, but muffled, as if heard from a distance, the noises of a fierce struggle, a fall, and then a confusion of strange sounds and movements.

Betty dragged at the heavy gate until her fingers were bruised and bleeding. She called loudly for help, and she besought Kerr to speak to her; but the gate resisted all her efforts, and there came no answer from that dark, inner room.

The tumult and the jangle of the harsh Arab voice died away at last, and they were succeeded by a terrible, ominous silence. Then there came the sound of a footstep, the gate was thrust violently open from within, and a shrouded figure, that could only be seen dimly in the uncertain light, flung himself out, rushed across the court and disappeared through the deep doorway beyond. After that

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there was silence again, as profound as if the whole occurrence had been nothing but a vision—a ghastly nightmare—summoned up by the associations and weird influences of the ruined temple and its mysterious occupant.

Elizabeth, who had been still clinging to the gate, was thrown to the ground as it burst open, but she struggled to her feet immediately and groped her way through the now open doorway. On the threshold of the inner chamber she stopped and peered fearfully into the thick, impenetrable gloom.

Everything was quiet, as quiet as the grave. There was no sound of movement—no sign of life.

Was she, then, after all, too late? Had all the warnings been in vain, and was Kerr already dead, murdered here in the darkness, and beyond the reach for ever of her help and of her love?

CHAPTER XV

KERR was dead. He had been murdered ruthlessly by his unknown and unseen assailant. There could be no other possible explanation of the terrible silence which now brooded over the narrow room.

Elizabeth crept forward noiselessly into the thick, close darkness, and as she did so, she dreaded every moment that her advancing feet would come into contact with the prostrate body of the man she loved. It seemed to her, in that moment of realisation and despair, that her own life must needs come to an end as well.

He was dead. She paused and held her breath to listen, but there was no whisper, no sound of movement. She sank down on to her knees and groped before her with shrinking fingers.

And then, suddenly, the voice of Kerr himself broke the silence, and to her amazement it came from above her head, and not from the sandy floor over which she was stooping. "Who's there?" he said. And although the voice in which the challenge was made was rather weak, it was still clear and defiant. "Who's there?"

A cry of joy and relief broke from Elizabeth's stiff lips. She started to her feet, and staggering backwards clung to the cold, stone wall for support.

"Who's there?" Kerr demanded for the third time, and then, with a great effort, the woman recovered herself and faltered out, in a tremulous whisper, "It is I—Elizabeth Cathcart."

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"Miss Cathcart! You here! Impossible! How did you come? And why?"

Betty's courage and self-control were beginning to return to her and, her voice was steady again as she answered:

"Never mind now, Major Kerr. I will tell you everything afterwards. We must get away from this place at once. It is dangerous to stay here. That man—whoever he was—may come back—he may have heard us speaking. Come, let us go now; there is not a moment to be lost."

Kerr laughed, and the sound of his merriment seemed strange and unnatural as it echoed through the darkness.

"Go at once," he repeated. "I wish to goodness that I could go at once. Just feel on the floor, Miss Cathcart. I must apologise for not offering to help you. Hunt about a bit; I think you will find some matches, and then you will see why it is not so easy for me to follow your excellent suggestion."

Betty obeyed, and stooping down she searched with her hands in the cold sand.

"I don't think you need be afraid that that chap will come back just yet. I expect he thinks that he has done for me altogether. And so he did, pretty nearly. By Jove, it was a close thing. Found the matches? That's right. Now strike one and you will see what a nice fix I am in."

Elizabeth struck a match on the rough stone wall at her side, and as the little flame burnt up, it was certainly a strange and unexpected sight that met her eyes.

There, in front of her, grim and upright, was the black granite figure of the goddess, and standing in front of it, bound to the image by innumerable coils

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and twists of thin, brown rope, was Kerr. His feet, that were fastened firmly together, rested upon the narrow stone base. His hands were tied behind him, and blood, trickling from a wound on his forehead, disfigured his pale face.

The man laughed again as he saw the horror and consternation in the other's face, and then the match went out and the thick darkness closed around them once more.

"I'm fairly caught this time, eh, Miss Cathcart? And I have a good idea of how a trussed turkey must feel, but it's all right now. As you have turned up so opportunely to release me, there's no need to bother. I came out here to look for something—and I suppose that beggar thought it a fine scheme to follow me up and knock me over the head. He must have been a bit disappointed, for I don't believe I had more than five or six piastres in my pockets."

"Who was it?" faltered Elizabeth. "Did—did you see his face?"

"Oh, dear, no. He came up behind and hit me a tremendous crack with something that knocked the sense out of me completely for a minute or two, and then he must have searched my pockets, found there was nothing there, and tied me up like this, so that he should have time to get clear off. We may as well see about leaving, if you don't mind. This is rather a stuffy hole. There's a knife in my waistcoat pocket. I'm awfully sorry to give you so much trouble, but I think I must ask you to get it out, and then you will be able to cut these very unpleasant little ropes."

Elizabeth obeyed, and as she did so, she explained in a few words what she had seen as she stood outside

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the closed gate of the temple. Kerr gave vent to a low whistle of astonishment.

"A knife! Well, upon my word! It was a nearer thing than I thought, and, of course, I remember now, I heard you call out 'Take care!' That was what made me turn round, and if I had not turned the brute would have stabbed me in the back, instead of merely giving me a scratch across the forehead. It seems to me, Miss Cathcart, that I have to thank you for saving my life."

Elizabeth did not answer. She had slipped her hand into his pocket as he had desired her, but the knife was not there.

"What! Isn't it there? That's queer. Would you mind trying the coat, please. Four outside, two inside. Not in those either? I wonder if that Arab took it. No—now I come to think of it, Dot borrowed my knife this afternoon and never brought it back."

Betty's hands dropped to her sides, and a sudden chill of fear touched her heart. The short glimpse that she had had of the man's tightly-pinioned figure before the match went out had shown her that, if no means of cutting the ropes were available, the task of releasing him would not be an easy one by any means.

"Perhaps it would be a good plan to strike another match," Kerr went on, "and get an idea of the knots, and which one would be the best to begin with. Be sparing with those matches, please. I used up no end of them myself, and it's the only box I've got."

He spoke quietly and cheerfully enough, but Elizabeth's keen ears could detect the note of growing anxiety in his voice.

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The situation had seemed simple, and, indeed, almost laughable, a few minutes ago, before the loss of the knife had been discovered, and when Kerr's release had appeared to be a matter of course, but now it was rapidly assuming a more serious aspect. The prospect of a prolonged imprisonment in that dark, close room was not agreeable, and, besides, although as yet neither of them had formulated the thought, the possibility of the return of the Arab who had attacked Kerr, was present in both their minds.

Elizabeth struck the match, and holding it carefully in one hand, she examined the fastenings of the bonds with eager eyes. When the little torch had burnt itself out she set to work without a moment's delay.

For some time she toiled on, deftly and feverishly, but without result. It was evident that the man who had bound Kerr was no novice at his work, and the tough, thin cords were wound round and round the prisoner's limbs and body, and knotted again and again with what seemed to be an almost fiendish dexterity and ingenuity. Betty's slender fingers could make no impression on those hard, complicated fastenings, and the impenetrable darkness added a thousandfold to her difficulties. At last, after what seemed like long hours of fruitless endeavour, she paused with a hopeless little sigh.

"It will take ages," she said. "It must be my own clumsiness, but I have not undone one of the knots yet, and there are dozens of them. I had better strike another match, Major Kerr, and try to find an easier place to begin."

"No, wait a minute, you are dead beat, and I feel a brute, I can tell you, having you work for me

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like this. Look here, Miss Cathcart, I don't see how we shall ever get away at this rate. I believe that the best plan would be for you to go and try to find someone to cut me loose. There should be the gaffir somewhere about. He unlocked the gates for me and then went off, but anyway there is a man at the entrance of the big temple. If you would go there and send him back with a knife—it would only take you a few minutes, and, of course, you must not come back. Wait for me outside the pylon, or, better still, if your donkey is there, get back to Luxor as quickly as you can, and I will follow. You must be tired to death as it is."

Betty hesitated. She hated the thought of leaving him alone in that gloomy prison, but she was a sensible woman and could not help seeing that the suggestion was a good one. Her long struggle with the close, complicated knots had shown her that the task of releasing him unaided was quite beyond her powers, and she knew that delay might be dangerous, or even fatal.

It would, as he said, be an easy matter to summon assistance from the guardians at the main entrance to the temple, and although the prospect of the dark, lonely walk before the pylon could be reached was terrible to her, this was not the time to give way to foolish terrors.

As to Kerr's further command that she should wait at the gate or make her way back to Luxor, that, naturally, was out of the question, for how could she think of her own comfort and her own weariness until his safety was ensured. Elizabeth smiled to herself there in the darkness, as she turned away from the captive and listened to his repeated instructions to the effect that, when once assistance

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had been dispatched, she must on no account think of returning to the temple of Ptah.

There was not a sound to be heard as Betty stole softly out of the building and across the open courtyard. She passed through the doorway and emerged into the avenue of columns beyond.

It was quiet and lonely there among the old ruins, and it was wonderfully beautiful, too, for the moon was rising, and the stars were beginning to grow small and faint in the pale sky.

The graceful pillars showed one behind another in a long vista, and their clustered shafts and flower-like capitals were touched with silvery light.

Elizabeth, however, had no eye this evening for loveliness of form or colour. It seemed to her that every deep shadow might be a hiding-place, and that every broken pillar and wall might conceal a crouching foe. When, at the entrance of the temple, the expected happened and a dark form suddenly sprang out and confronted her, there was but little surprise mingled with the horror in the scream that broke from her lips.

It was the same native who had attacked Kerr. There could be no doubt on that score, for she recognised instantly the muffled figure that had darted past her in the courtyard. The thick folds of his upper garment were still pulled low down over his head and across his mouth, so that the features were entirely concealed.

His lean right hand clutched the knife, and, as he raised it menacingly, the moonbeams flickered on the long, sharp blade.

For one moment Elizabeth stood motionless as if frozen to the ground, while the Arab confronted

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her and barred the way of escape from the temple. Then he took a step forward, and, as he did so, he stretched out his left hand and caught at the loose folds of her dress.

She dragged herself away with a swift movement, and, turning, ran like a startled hare, back between the rows of columns and across the court.

She did not pause until she was once more in the inner shrine with Kerr close at hand, and with his anxious voice sounding in her ears.

"What is it? What has happened? Why have you come back?"

"The man!"—Betty gasped out the words breathlessly—"the Arab. He is outside. He tried to catch me. Ah, there he is!"

An exclamation of dismay burst from Kerr's lips, for even while she was speaking, there was a faint glimmer of light in the little room. The next moment his former assailant had made his re-appearance upon the scene of his crime.

He carried a lantern in his hand, and its dim rays flashed strangely upon Kerr and upon the impassive, lion face of the stone goddess.

They shone, too, upon Betty as she leaned back against the wall, panting and breathless, with dilated eyes, and with her hands pressed closely to her throbbing heart.

The Arab swung the lantern in his hand so that its light flickered fantastically from side to side of the narrow room, and, as he did so, he broke into peal after peal of wild, jangling laughter. Elizabeth shivered as she listened, and Kerr's face grew even more set and stern.

It was the laughter of a maniac. They could not doubt that for a moment. A man in his senses

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could never give vent to those terrible sounds, and no less insane were the frenzied gestures with which he flung the lantern to the ground, and, still holding the concealing folds of his cloak across his face, strode backwards and forwards and brandished the knife above his head.

The laughter ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and then the man advanced upon Kerr with slow, stealthy footsteps. He seized him by the shoulder and raised the weapon as if about to plunge its blade into his victim's heart.

Elizabeth sprang forward with a cry, trying to ward off the blow, but the lunatic flung her aside with a thrust of his powerful, sinewy arm. He turned towards Kerr again and brought down the knife, inch by inch, until it touched the man's breast and the point pierced through the rough tweed of his coat. Then he slowly raised it again, and catching Betty's arm, swung her away from the wall against which she was leaning. Grasping her wrist he went through the whole ghastly pantomime for the second time.

Kerr felt the sweat gathering on his forehead as he watched, powerless to move a finger in the woman's behalf, then the Arab flung her from him and burst into a ghastly peal of laughter.

He began to speak after that, standing close to Kerr, and accompanying his words with fierce, uncouth gestures. He pointed to the east, and then raised his hand slowly until the finger indicated the wooden roof above his head. This movement was repeated again and again, and it always ended with a wild flourish of the knife, first towards Kerr and then towards Betty. The narrow chamber seemed to be full of the clamour of the loud, violent voice, and

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although the speech was incomprehensible to his listeners, still they could not doubt that the words were full of horrible meaning and menace.

The harsh voice sounded thick and indistinct, coming as it did from behind the muffling folds of the garment in which the man's head was enveloped, but this only served to make the effect more strange and more alarming. Finally, with one last upward fling of both arms, the harangue came to an end. He picked up the lantern and stole away, crouching and furtive, out of the little room and into the moonlit courtyard beyond.

Almost before the last flicker of light had disappeared, Elizabeth was working desperately at the knotted ropes, striking one match after another recklessly in her endeavour to find some way out of the inextricable tangle. It was not until only two matches remained in the box, and her fingers were numbed and bleeding, that she abandoned her task and acknowledged that her efforts were useless.

"It's no good," she said hopelessly. "No good. We must wait here till someone comes to help us—or till—"

She stopped, but there was obvious meaning in the unfinished sentence. Kerr, who had not spoken since the departure of the Arab, echoed the words:

"Or till— What were you going to say? I'm afraid that there is not very much chance of anyone coming here before morning."

"And that will be too late." There was no hesitation in Betty's voice now; one might almost have fancied that its tones held a touch of exaltation. "It will be too late, Major Kerr. Oh, it is absurd and foolish for us to pretend that we don't understand. There is no hope of escape. That

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man is mad, but it was easy to see what he meant. He will come back again when the moon is risen and kill us both."

"I'm afraid that you are right," Kerr answered quietly. "And, well, for myself it is no great matter. Soldiers expect to die suddenly, you know, although, naturally, one would not choose such a hole-and-corner death as this. It is you that I am thinking of. I can do nothing to save you, and I cannot even ask you to go away and leave me here when that mad brute is hanging about outside."

"You need not be troubled about me," the other replied, and, although he could not see it, she was smiling as she spoke. "It's all right, yes, quite all right. One can only die once after all, and I'm not afraid."

There was a long silence. Something in the woman's voice had attracted Kerr's attention and had brought back to his mind thoughts that had been instilled there by little Dot, only a few hours before

He seemed to be able to see the child's small, eager face and to feel the touch of her soft, warm fingers on his hand.

"You will find it for Aunt Betty, won't you? Promise me faithfully that you will, for she says she loves her little 'Key of Life' better than anything in the whole world."

"Better than anything in the whole world." He had repeated the sentence to himself again and again as he trudged along the dusty road on his way to Karnak. Surely the phrase was an extravagant one.

Had Dot exaggerated her aunt's words? Or could it be—was it possible—that Elizabeth cared

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for him? And that it was for his sake that the little amulet was prized so highly?

Kerr was a loyal friend and a good comrade. He knew that Jack Feilden trusted him absolutely, and he knew too that never once since his arrival in Luxor had he betrayed that trust by word or deed.

It was true that he loved Elizabeth—loved her devotedly—but she was betrothed to Feilden, and he had, therefore, made up his mind to leave Luxor as soon as the blind man could be persuaded to agree to his departure.

He was certain that, had it been possible, he could have made Betty happy, as Jack—capricious, selfish and narrow-minded—would never be able to do, and he believed that if there had been no obstacle in the way, he might have succeeded in winning her heart. But Feilden stood between them, and although he had begun to suspect that Elizabeth no longer cared for her former lover, the further idea that she might have learnt to return his own love had never, hitherto, entered his mind.

Dot's words had first awakened him, and they had served to startle him completely out of his usual calm self-possession.

Supposing that Betty cared for him. Should she be allowed to sacrifice herself and her whole future to a mistaken idea of honour and fidelity? How would it be possible for him to ascertain the truth upon which all his actions must depend? And how, when that truth were known, could he reconcile his duty to the woman he loved with his loyalty towards the man who trusted in him so implicitly? These thoughts had followed one another in constant reiteration through Bertram Kerr's mind during

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his walk to Karnak, and while he searched the floor of the temple of Ptah for the missing amulet, but he had been able to see no way out of his perplexities. Then the sudden attack, the stunning blow and the inexplicable appearance of Betty herself upon the scene, had driven all considerations but those of her safety and escape from his thoughts, and it was only now, when escape seemed to be impossible, that the ring of undoubted happiness in the voice of his fellow-prisoner called them back to him with redoubled force.

It was evident that Elizabeth did not shrink from the cruel fate which threatened them. Was it—could it be that she loved him, and therefore rejoiced in the prospect of facing death at his side?

If he had been questioned a few hours earlier, it is probable that Kerr would have declared his intention of leaving Luxor immediately and of keeping silence for ever on the subject that lay so near his heart, but now things were different. The near approach of death has power to change many resolutions and to alter many points of view.

There could be no wrong done to Jack Feilden. It was too late to think about loyal scruples and wounded honour. He and the woman he loved were alone, face to face with certain death—and surely there must be truth between them, truth and absolute honesty at the last.

“Miss Cathcart,” Kerr said quietly, “there is one thing that I want to say to you before—well, before it is too late. I came here to look for your little amulet. Dot told me that you had lost it here, and she told me something else too. She said that you loved it better than anything in the whole world. Did you really say that? Is it true?”

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It was a moment or two before Elizabeth answered. "Yes," she said at last, very softly, "yes, it is true."

There was another pause and then the man spoke again.

"And why," he insisted, "why should you value it so much? You must tell me, please. There is not very much longer now, and we must be truthful with each other. Tell me—" as she did not reply, "tell me, Elizabeth, was it—is it possible that it was because you care for me?"

Still she did not answer, but there, in the darkness, she clasped her hands tightly together and the diamonds of Feilden's engagement ring, cutting into her slender fingers, seemed to seal her lips.

After a little while Kerr went on speaking. There was a new huskiness in his voice.

"There is no need for you to answer my question," he said, "perhaps I had no right to ask it, but there is one thing that I must say to you—one thing that I should like you to know. Weeks ago I told you that I loved you. It was true then, it is true—more true than ever, now. That is all; but, perhaps—presently—it will be less lonely for you if you remember that you are with a man who loves you better than his own soul, and who would do anything in the world to serve you."

His voice died away and there was a long silence. When he broke it at last it was to say, in quite his natural tones, "Miss Cathcart, how many matches are there left in the box?"

"Two," she replied. "That is all."

"Two. Well, let's see; one had better be kept for emergencies, but the other we can use now. I'm going to ask you a favour, a very great favour.

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Will you come near to me, and strike that match so that I can have a good look at you once more? I—I have a fancy that I would like to see you before—before the Arab comes back.”

Kerr listened, with straining ears, as the soft footfall crossed the sandy floor. He heard the scrape of the match, and then for a few moments Elizabeth's face looked at him out of the darkness. The eyes were wide and full of tears, the lips trembled a little and a touch of colour dyed the cheeks, but there was not a trace of sorrow nor a stain of fear in the beautiful face. The match flickered and went out.

Betty had tried hard to control her features under the ordeal of Kerr's searching blue eyes, but he had perceived something that emboldened him to make his next request.

“Would you grant me another favour, Elizabeth? It will not hurt nor annoy poor old Jack now. Will you kiss me once before we die?” Still in silence Betty came near to him again. Her clasped hands touched his breast, and the soft waves of her hair brushed against his lips. She lifted her head and he kissed her forehead very gently.

After that neither of them spoke for what seemed like a long time, and then Elizabeth stole to the doorway of the central chamber and looked out over the moonlit courtyard. It all looked peaceful and deserted, but, from where she was standing, it was possible to see through the massive stone doorway in the wall opposite. As she watched, far away, in the distance, she caught the gleam of an approaching lantern.

She turned and went back to Kerr's side.

“He is coming,” she whispered. “I can see the light, he is coming back.”

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"I thought so," was the reply. "I knew that it would not be much longer. The moon must be getting high. Elizabeth"—he said her name softly and slowly, as if the sound of its syllables gave him pleasure—"Elizabeth, there is still one more match, why should we keep it any longer? I must—yes, I must see your face once more. Strike it quickly, before it is too late." Betty obeyed, but her fingers were less steady than they had been. She dropped the match and its tiny flame was extinguished instantly on the sandy floor.

"Hard lines," said Kerr, with a disappointed little laugh. "You're sure it was the last? Well, it can't be helped; the fellow may hold his lantern so that I can see you, and, anyhow, we are together, and that is something to be grateful for."

And then Elizabeth came close to Kerr and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"I love you," she said, and there was happiness, and even a touch of exaltation, in her voice. "I love you, I love you, I love you." She raised herself on tip-toe, there in the darkness, until her face was on a level with his, and kissed his lips.

The sound of footsteps could be heard now distinctly. Betty slipped down from the narrow base of the statue, on which she had been standing, and when the light of the lantern flashed into the room, she was at Kerr's side leaning against his shoulder. Her hand was passed through his bound arm and there was a wonderful expression of mingled joy and triumph on her pale, beautiful face.

And, after all, it was the unexpected that came to pass, and instead of death deliverance and life were at hand.

In the open doorway, standing out clearly against

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the darkness, was the small, shrinking figure of a native woman. So slight was the shrouded form, so tiny the hand that held the heavy lantern, that she might almost have been taken for a child. Her face was hidden by the thin black veil and only the wistful dark eyes were visible. These eyes were lit up to brilliance by the upward striking rays of the lantern. The light flickered also on a silver ornament at her breast, and on the sharp blade of a knife, that she was holding half-concealed beneath the folds of her coarse garment.

For a moment she stood there on the threshold peering forward into the gloom. Then she set down the lantern and approached the two occupants of the narrow cell. She had shifted the knife into her right hand now, and with the left she gathered the black veil still more closely round her face.

Kerr and Elizabeth watched the woman in amazement, but it was evident from the first that she had no sinister motive. With swift dexterity she wielded the great knife, which seemed almost too large and heavy for her slender hands, and which—Betty recognised it with a shudder—was the same weapon that they had seen a short time before in the grasp of their mad assailant. The tough knots that had proved so baffling were soon conquered and the brown strands of rope were cut again and again. Betty knelt down on the sand and assisted to the best of her power, with fingers that trembled violently now that the danger was over, and in a few minutes Kerr was at liberty once again.

The Arab woman said nothing as she worked, but she seemed to be impatient and fearful. From time to time she cast apprehensive glances over her shoulder in the direction of the open doorway.

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When the prisoner was free she watched with manifest uneasiness as he stretched his limbs and rubbed his bruised wrists and ankles, and at length, as if unable to endure the delay any longer, she picked up the lantern from the ground, and catching at Elizabeth's arm, drew her out of the narrow chamber.

Kerr followed, somewhat stiffly, and they made their way across the courtyard and down the avenue of columns. It was full moonlight and everything could be seen as clearly as if it had been mid-day, but there was no sign of either the mad Arab nor of the temple guardian. The whole place seemed to be deserted.

At the entrance, where the deeply-cut pathway leads upward and onward to the great mass of the Karnak ruins, the woman stopped, and with another frightened, furtive glance behind her, she drew Betty to one side. Then she pulled at a cord which was hanging round her neck and drew out a silver ornament.

She held it down to the light of the lantern, so that the Englishwoman might be able to see it clearly, and then she pointed to Kerr with her tiny hand. The ornament was an English coin, a florin, with a hole roughly pierced through it, and it was hanging on what looked like a frayed shred of brown rope.

Kerr was stooping to pick up something that he had noticed lying on the ground at his feet, and he, therefore, did not see the little pantomime.

The next moment the Arab woman turned away, and without a word or sign of farewell glided back into the temple of Ptah. Kerr and Elizabeth were left alone.

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"We had better go at once," the man said quietly. "That wretched lunatic may still be somewhere about, and see here, it's a queer thing, isn't it? I caught sight of this a minute ago. It is your little mascot—the 'Key of Life.'"

It did not take Kerr and Betty long to hurry across the rough open ground and back through the great temple, and they saw nothing more of either their assailant or their rescuer.

Now that all the danger and excitement was over Elizabeth felt utterly exhausted and depressed. The long strain and the unaccustomed physical exertions were beginning to tell upon her. Her exaltation, and even her courage, seemed to have evaporated, and a dull, hopeless misery mingled with the relief in her heart.

There was life before her, it is true, instead of the cruel death which had appeared so imminent, but, as yet, she hardly knew whether she were glad or sorry.

Of course she was grateful. She repeated the words to herself more than once as if to impress their reality on her mind; or, at least, she ought to be grateful for their escape, and yet—and yet—There had been something very sweet in the thought of the death that was to have been shared with the man she loved, and now nothing but pain and loneliness lay before her in the future.

A little sob broke from her lips as she stumbled wearily along, and then she felt Kerr's supporting hand on her arm, and his voice, kind and cheery as ever, sounded in her ears.

"Here we are at last. You are dead beat, and no wonder, but now we only have to find your donkey, and you shall be back in Luxor in no time."

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During the short journey back to Luxor, Kerr did his best to talk naturally and cheerfully to his companion, for he could see that she was over-wrought and exhausted now that the long ordeal had come to an end. He did not ask her to explain how it was that she had come so opportunely to his assistance, and he spoke of the adventure as if it had been quite an unimportant and everyday affair.

"That man was a lunatic, and a dangerous one," he said. "I told the gaffir, as we came through the gate, to be on the look-out, and not to let anyone go into the temple to-night. To-morrow I will give information to the authorities and see that he is put away safely somewhere. A madman of that sort is certain to be well known, luckily, for it was so dark that neither you nor I would be able to identify him. You shall not be bothered about the affair, Miss Cathcart. It will be easy for me to manage everything, and there is no need for the whole of Luxor to hear about our little adventure."

He called her Miss Cathcart again, and not Elizabeth, as he had done in the temple of Ptah. Betty shivered, as if with a sudden chill, but she tried to keep her attention on what he was saying.

"I believe," she said, "that he was the old man, the rope-maker, that we saw to-day; you remember, I thought then that he was mad. And the woman—I am almost certain that it was she who gave you the bunch of flowers."

Kerr whistled. "By Jove," he said, "you may be right. There's no doubt that the fellow was uncommonly handy with ropes. These natives are queer people, to be sure. This one was mad, of

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course; but even when they are sane they do strange things, and it does not take much to rouse them and make them savage. I remember one evening, ten years ago, an old Arab got into a furious rage with me about nothing at all."

Betty listened as if in a dream. "What was it that happened?" she asked, and Kerr went on with his story, thinking that it would, at least, divert her attention from the thought of the terrible danger through which they had so lately

"It was here, at Luxor, and I was walking near the river. I had a dog with me, and he knocked over a little native girl with a pot of water on her head. The jar was broken, of course, the water spilled, and the child frightened nearly out of her wits. Well, I did what I could to mend matters. Picked up the poor little thing, tried to comfort her, and gave her a kiss and a baksheesh, when a man appeared on the scene and made no end of a row. I suppose it was all about the broken jar. My donkey-boy told me afterwards that the little girl was the man's wife or daughter—I forget which, but he was evidently very much annoyed. I left Luxor that evening, so I did not hear anything more about it, but it shows what queer-tempered beggars these Arabs are. I expect the row was soon over—these things usually are—but I hope they let the child keep her two-shilling piece."

"Her two-shilling piece!" Betty echoed the words, and she was on the point of relating the story of the final episode in the temple when the remembrance of the question which had been troubling her all day flashed back into her mind. Even if she were tired and unhappy, Jack and Jack's welfare

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must not be forgotten. She hastened to explain her difficulty to her companion, and then waited eagerly for his answer.

Kerr walked on in silence for a few moments before making any reply, and then he treated the affair more lightly than she had been inclined to do.

"Perhaps you had better mention it to Haynes," he said. "He may think it a favourable symptom, but I doubt if he will question Feilden at present. The poor fellow will probably remember everything before long. If you think of it, Miss Cathcart, he told us very little, really, the other night, and said nothing that could give us a clue as to where or why he was imprisoned. To tell you the truth, I do not believe that anything very definite ever will be discovered. My theory is that the whole business was an ordinary one of robbery. Feilden was very generous and open-handed, and the Arabs got it into their heads that he was a millionaire, waited for an opportunity, and attacked him when he was out on one of his solitary walks. Feilden would resist, naturally, and they knocked him about a bit, in all probability, and then found that they had him on their hands, wounded and unconscious, and were at their wits' end to know what to do with him. It is a serious matter to murder an Englishman, you see, and if they had left him where he was, and he had happened to recognise them, there would have been trouble. One can understand the difficulty that they were in, and the imprisonment may have been a sort of compromise. I should say that they did not intend to keep him for long, but that the affair made a stir in the place, and they were afraid to let him go. Here we are at last,

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Miss Cathcart, and I expect you are not sorry to be at home."

They had reached the hotel, and Kerr lifted Betty from her donkey as he spoke, and then they passed the porter's lodge and went on into the moonlit garden.

It was evident that the fancy ball was still in full swing, for the verandah was brilliantly illuminated and the strains of a waltz tune floated out on to the warm air. Kerr and Elizabeth made their way through the palm trees and hibiscus bushes and reached the side door of the hotel, for they neither of them felt inclined to encounter their fellow-tourists, nor to run the gauntlet of stares and questions, with which they would have been greeted had they made a more public entry.

The little terrace by the side door was deserted, and the passage beyond was dark and empty.

Kerr stopped and opened the door, and then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he put his hand into his pocket.

"I had nearly forgotten it," he said. "Here is your mascot again, Miss Cathcart, here is your 'Key of Life.'"

Betty took it from him with a whispered word of thanks, and then she looked up and found that the man's eyes were fixed gravely on her face.

"Good-night," he said. "You have saved my life this evening, but I cannot thank you for that now. It is too late to keep you, and you are tired to death. Will you speak to me here, in the garden, to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock? There are some things that I must say to you—things that I must know."

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"Yes," she answered softly. "Yes, I will be here."

She held out her hand to him, and Kerr took it in his. Then he bent his head, and gently—almost reverently—pressed the slender fingers to his lips.

CHAPTER XVI

KERR was waiting for Elizabeth when she made her appearance in the garden on the following afternoon. He came forward to meet her with a conventional word of greeting, but there was a light in his blue eyes that had the power to set her heart beating quickly, and to call a flame of vivid crimson to her pale cheeks.

They had the garden almost to themselves, for most of the inhabitants of the hotel were either resting after the exertions of the previous evening or else having tea in the shady verandah.

It was very hot, and there was not a breath of wind to stir the graceful, drooping palm fronds. The air was heavy and fragrant with the scent of roses, and a tropical languor and silence seemed to brood over everything.

The scarlet blossoms of the hibiscus glowed amidst their dark, burnished foliage, and a tall tree near the hotel was covered with the gorgeous festoons of a bougainvillea.

Major Kerr was standing near this tree when Elizabeth joined him, and they walked together towards the shady avenue that leads down to the river gate.

Betty was quite certain that she knew what the subject was upon which her companion wished to speak, and she had been looking forward to this meeting with no little pain and misgiving. He was

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going away, of course, and at once. After what had happened on the previous evening that was the only possible thing to be done, and he desired to see her and bid her farewell before taking his departure.

She was aware that he had meant to leave Luxor some time before, and that it had been at Feilden's request, and because he was unwilling to disappoint the blind man, that he had changed his plans.

Now, however, the position of affairs had altered, and even poor Jack's wishes would have to be disregarded.

Kerr would go away to England, or perhaps back to India. He would resume his old career, his old occupations, his old amusements. He would forget her in time, and she would stay on with Jack, to live out her life and to bear her trials as best she could.

The prospect was not a bright one, but Elizabeth had had time now to recover her courage and her strength, and she was determined to face the future bravely and to endure everything with a good grace.

She did not feel ashamed or guilty as she looked back upon the events of the previous evening, and even the thought of the kiss that she had, of her own accord, given Kerr, at the moment when death seemed inevitable, did not trouble her mind.

She loved him—she realised that—and had realised it for weeks, and the knowledge that he knew of her love did not seem, after all, to make very much difference. She loved him and she trusted him absolutely, and he loved her in return; but her promise was given to Jack Feilden. Her vows must be kept inviolate whatever happened, and, therefore, she and Kerr must needs bid each other farewell.

There was no possible alternative, or so it seemed to her. The parting was inevitable. It was fate;

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and with these thoughts in her mind Elizabeth came out into the sun-lit garden to meet her lover and to say good-bye to him for ever.

She was pale this afternoon, and her eyes were very sad and heavy, but at the same time, she was perfectly calm and self-possessed.

Kerr thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful as now, standing there under the shade of the palm trees, with the sunbeams sifting through the interlacing fronds and touching her fair hair with edges of golden light. She had gathered a crimson rose as they came along the garden path, and held it listlessly between her slender fingers.

They paced on for a few moments in silence, and then the man stopped and looked down into his companion's quiet face.

"I want to ask you," he said, "whether what you told me last night was true?"

There was a little pause, but the other did not pretend to misunderstand. She broke the stem of the rose in half slowly before she answered.

"Yes," she said at last; and her voice, although perfectly steady, was almost inaudible. "Yes, it was true."

"You are sure," Kerr went on, "you are quite sure that it was not a mistake? It might easily have been, very easily. We thought, both of us, that death was quite certain, and I had been telling you of my love. It may have been that you wanted to help me, and to make me happy, in a very dark moment. It might well have been that, Miss Cathcart, and, if so, it was a kind thought, and I can only thank you for it, most humbly, and with all my heart. Am I right? Tell me, please. Did you

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mean it when you said that you loved me, or was it a mistake? ”

“ No,” said Betty, in a low whisper; “ no, it was true.”

“ Then,” Kerr went on, and as he spoke, he took the hand that held the rose in both his, “ then, Elizabeth, you will be my wife? ”

Elizabeth started away, snatching her hand from his grasp so hurriedly that the petals of the flower were scattered and fell in a little rosy shower to her feet. Her face flamed into crimson, and a look of absolute wonder and consternation filled her eyes. The proposal was so unexpected as to disconcert her completely, for she had never doubted the willingness of Kerr to acquiesce in her programme of self-sacrifice and separation.

She felt as if all her old ideals and prejudices were being torn away from her ruthlessly, and as if the solid earth itself were beginning to give way beneath her feet.

“ It is impossible,” she faltered. “ Oh, why do you ask me? You must see that it is impossible. I cannot desert Jack.”

The determination in Kerr’s face and the light in his eyes did not change.

“ No,” he said very quietly, “ it is not impossible; and, Elizabeth, you must listen to me—you must hear what I have to say before you give me an answer. There must be truth between us. That is the chief thing—truth. You have told me that you love me, then it follows, does it not, that you no longer care for Jack Feilden? ”

Elizabeth winced, and then she recovered herself with a great effort and raised her eyes steadily to his. After all, he was right in what he said. There must

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be truth between them, at least, although there never could be any other bond. They had faced danger and death together, side by side. There should be no prevarications and deceptions now.

"Yes," she said, "you are right. I do not love Jack any longer. My love for him seemed to die, to wither away, the day that I first saw him here in Luxor. He had changed so much, or perhaps it was I that had changed, but we seemed to be miles—centuries apart. It was as if we were different people from what we had been in England ten years ago."

"You were a child then, a baby of sixteen or seventeen. You cannot have known your own mind."

Betty turned to him sharply and almost defiantly with burning cheeks and shining eyes.

"It was not that," she cried. "No, you must not think it was that. I was young, if you like, but I understood, and—and I loved him. Oh, there is no excuse for me now—none. I loved him. I am not going to call it a childish fancy or a school-girl's romance, for it was nothing of that sort. It was love. I loved him then, and for ten years, when I thought he was dead, I still loved him. You must not mistake me—you must not. I loved him—yes, I loved him as, now, I love you."

She spoke passionately and fervently, in defence of her lost love, for there was to be truth between them, and not lies and misunderstandings. Kerr repeated her last words in a low voice.

"As you love me. I am quite content with that, dearest, when I know it is me that you love—now."

Elizabeth wrung her hands together miserably. All her morbid scruples were crowding back upon her once more. She was cruel, she told herself—cruel,

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heartless and faithless, but Jack, who had done no wrong, who had suffered so bitterly, should not be sacrificed.

"It is wicked of me," she said. "I hate myself more than I can say. But Jack must never know—must never guess. I do not love him, but I will give everything—my whole life—to make him happy."

Kerr said nothing for a moment or two, but stood looking along the shady avenue with a thoughtful expression on his face. He was firmly convinced in his own mind of the rights and wrongs of the case, but he could see that it would be no easy matter to make Elizabeth, sensitive, imaginative and highly strung as she was, look at the affair from his point of view.

When he spoke again his voice was very quiet and passionless. He made Betty sit down on one of the garden seats, while he stood leaning against a tree at her side.

"Listen to me," he said. "We must discuss this question calmly, and there is no use in being morbid and sentimental about it. You have not been heartless and cruel. Instead, you were faithful to Feilden's memory for ten years. It is a long time, and, if during those years you had chosen to marry, nobody could have said a word. It would have been natural, the most natural thing in the world. Supposing, even, that you had been Jack's wife when he disappeared in Egypt, and, believing yourself to be his widow, had married, you would not have been to blame. It is ridiculous, you must see that, to call yourself faithless now. Then you came out here and found poor Feilden different from what you had expected—was not that it? And you realised that you did not love him any longer. You say that

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he has not really changed, and that it is you, yourself, who have altered; well, all that is probably quite true, and it is the very reason why you no longer love him.

"Can't you understand it all, Elizabeth? It seems such a simple matter to me. Ten years ago you were a girl, and Jack was a boy, and you loved each other. Now Feilden is a boy still, in many ways. He has had no chance of growing into a man, and all his good qualities have been warped and stunted. He is a boy, I say, while you have changed from a girl into a woman. You have grown beyond Jack and above him, and it would be impossible—against Nature—for you to love him still, in the same way, as you did ten years ago. You must see it, Elizabeth, you must, for it is true."

Betty did not answer. She was sitting there pale and motionless as a marble statue, with her hands lying listless in her lap, and her blue eyes dreamy and unseeing. The man went on speaking, and his voice grew more earnest and insistent.

"We all change—we must change—and ten years is a long time. Why, when I was eight years old, for instance, I thought of nothing but pet rabbits and marbles; I was never happy unless I was sticky with jam and toffy; and then at eighteen I was grown up, a man almost, working hard for the army, and mad to pass first in my exams. We must change, Elizabeth. There would be something wrong and abnormal about us if we did not; and that is just what is wrong with poor Feilden. If he had changed too, if he had grown up, as it were, perhaps, who knows, you might have been able to love him still."

Betty turned half round, and leaning her elbow on the back of the garden seat she rested her chin on

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her hand, and looked up at Kerr with clear, steady eyes. His arguments, cool and straightforward as they were, carried weight, but, at the same time, her own determination was not shaken.

"Yes," she said, "you are right; I feel that you are right, but it does not make any difference. I must be true to Jack. Think of all that he has suffered. Think"—she shivered as she spoke—"think of what he said the other night in the temple. The horror of it, the misery, the hopelessness, and all through no fault of his own. Perhaps, if he had been to blame, if it had been, in any way, a punishment—But no, there is no crime that could deserve such a punishment as that. Ten years of suffering—ten years. I must, oh, I must try to make up to him for it now."

There was another long silence before Kerr spoke again. It was as if he were weighing his words carefully, and choosing those which might best further his cause.

"You are right in that," he said at last. "Poor old Feilden had done nothing to deserve his fate, he had done no wrong, but neither had you, Elizabeth, nor had I, and yet you wish to sacrifice us all. If it had been your fault that he came out to Egypt in the first place—if you had sent him on any foolish quest or mission—then, perhaps, it might have been your duty to devote your life to him now. Even if it had been through a mistake on your part—for there is no doubt that we have to suffer for our mistakes as well as for our faults—but there was nothing of the sort. Nobody was to blame in the matter; it was nobody's fault, nobody's mistake, and I do not believe that it can be right for you to sacrifice three lives to a morbid fancy."

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"Three lives!" Betty echoed the words, and a startled expression came into her face.

"Yes, three lives; your own, mine—although, perhaps, that is a small matter enough—and Jack Feilden's."

"Jack's?" The woman drew up her small head proudly. "You know that I would willingly die to make Jack happy."

"Yes, I know that you would, but you will have to live to make him happy, remember that, Elizabeth, and, in my opinion, it will be quite beyond your power. You do not love Jack. Do you imagine that you will be able to deceive him for long, blind as he is? It will be impossible, I tell you—impossible—and do you believe that, when he finds out the truth, the knowledge that you have lied to him and sacrificed yourself for him will add to his happiness? I don't know what you think about these things, Elizabeth, but to my mind you will do poor Feilden the greatest injury possible if you marry him without love. I always have sympathy with a girl who chucks her *fiancé*, even at the last moment, and bolts with another man, but I have none with the woman who, for money or position, or for any other reason whatever, marries a man whom she does not love. You must forgive me if I have spoken strongly, but I feel strongly about this, and now I won't bother you any more to-day." He laid his hand very gently, for a moment, on her bowed shoulder. "Do not say anything now. I do not want to hurry you, and I know that you need time to think, to make up your mind. I shall most likely go up to Aswán to-morrow morning. Will you give me your answer before I go?"

Elizabeth rose to her feet slowly and held out her hand.

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"Yes," she said, "to-morrow. I can say nothing yet. I do not know, but—to-morrow."

And then, while they stood there hand-in-hand, there was the patter of high-heeled shoes on the sandy path, and Gladys Norton made her appearance upon the scene.

Her mischievous black eyes took in the whole situation at a glance. She hesitated for a moment, and then came forward with an arch smile.

"I hope I don't intrude," she simpered. "Is it a case of 'two's company'? or may I speak to Miss Cathcart for a minute? I won't keep her, Major, I won't, indeed. It is only to say that Mr Feilden is down on the verandah. He is much better this afternoon, and he and I have been having such a nice talk. Now he wants to see his lady-love. He asked me to find you, Miss Cathcart, he did really, or I should never have dared to interrupt such a very interesting *tête-à-tête*."

She finished her speech with a malicious little laugh, and then, waving her hand in farewell, she turned and tripped away in the direction of the hotel. Kerr watched her retreating form with an expression of intense annoyance on his handsome, sunburnt face.

"Will you meet me in the temple to-morrow morning, Miss Cathcart?" he said. "We shall, at least, be undisturbed. At about eight o'clock. I know you often go there, at that time, to sketch."

"Very well," she answered, "I will be there, but oh! Major Kerr, you must not think that I have decided to give up Jack. You must not be sure—I do not know; it is so hard to know what is the right and the honest thing to do."

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"Yes," he said, "I understand."

"And if"—she went on hurriedly, and her eyes looked up beseechingly into his face—"if I cannot do it, if I have to stay with Jack and send you away, you will not try to persuade me, will you? I can decide nothing yet, and it is so new, so strange. But—but—one must do what one feels to be right, and—and—you will not make it more difficult."

Kerr's eyes were very gentle as he looked down on the sweet, agitated face.

"No," he said. "Believe me, I will not try to persuade you, I promise you that much. I have said all that I have to say, and now it is for you to decide. But, Betty, have some pity, do not be too hard on yourself and on me."

Elizabeth's face was very thoughtful and troubled as, after she had left Kerr, she walked slowly away along the quiet, shady path.

In spite of herself the words to which she had been listening had made a great impression upon her mind, and for the first time her resolution to devote herself to a life of sacrifice and self-abnegation was beginning to waver.

Question after question, argument after argument followed one another through her mind. What if, after all, he were right and she were wrong? What if her scruples were mistaken and morbid? What if the pathway of right and duty led, not towards the grey, dreary future that she had mapped out for herself, but in the direction of peace, and happiness, and love?

Betty's heart beat quickly, but she did not dare to let her mind dwell upon these wonderful dreams. Even if she decided at last in Kerr's favour there were still trials and difficulties in her way, and, as

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yet, she was very far indeed from coming to a decision.

Jack and Kerr. The claims of the two men had to be weighed carefully, and the very fact that her heart was on the side of Kerr was in itself, to a woman of her temperament, one of the strongest arguments in his rival's favour.

How could she disappoint Jack? How could she desert him? And yet, as Kerr's pleading words returned again and again to her mind, they seemed, with every reiteration, to gain in force and in truth.

She was, indeed, as he had said, a different being to the girl of ten years ago, with different ideals and different standards, and she had, perhaps, never realised this fact with such certainty as now, when she reached the verandah of the hotel, and with involuntary cruelty contrasted poor Jack, blind, wayward, feeble, and almost deformed, with the memory of the tall, upright figure, clear, straight-forward eyes and manly voice of Bertram Kerr.

"So there you are at last, Betty. What on earth have you been doing? I have been here for half-an-hour or more, and precious dull it would have been, I can tell you, if Miss Norton had not come along and taken pity on me. She's a ripping girl if you like. Any amount of go and all that. When we are married we must have some girls of that sort to stay in the house. Miss Norton would wake the old place up, by Jove, she would, and I must say that I like to have things nice and lively."

"You shall have anything you wish, dear," Elizabeth answered gently. "And now, would you like me to read to you for a little while? The English papers have come to-day, and there are some magazines."

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Feilden, however, refused this offer impatiently. He was feeling quite well again, better than he had done for days, and he wanted to talk and to be amused. For some time he chattered on, cheerfully enough, asking innumerable questions as to the doings of the people in the hotel, and the amusements and excursions that were being planned for the future. Betty was amazed to see how completely he seemed to have recovered from his depression, and then, suddenly, his mood changed. He stopped in the middle of a sentence, and, leaning forward, laid his hand heavily on her arm.

"Betty," he said, and his voice seemed to have altered as strangely as his manner had done. "Betty, there is something I want to ask you. I can't remember exactly, but I want you to tell me. The other night, when we went to the Temple, did I make a fool of myself in any way? Did—did I say anything?"

There was an expression of cunning and of anxiety in the blind man's face. His hot, grasping fingers burned Betty's arm through the thin muslin of her dress.

She hesitated for a moment, uncertain how to reply, and Jack went on more urgently.

"Tell me, tell me at once, I won't be deceived. You are all trying to deceive me. Did I say anything? Did I tell you about what happened to me while—while I was—away?"

"Yes, Jack." Elizabeth stroked his scarred wrist softly as she spoke. "Yes, dear. You told us a little about it. About the misery and the suffering. We are sorry, so sorry that you should remember it all, and we would do anything, yes, anything to help you to forget."

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"Forget—remember, of course I remember." Feilden laughed suddenly, and Betty shuddered as she listened. "I remember always—always. Do you think that I could ever forget it? But nobody must know, nobody but you, and you will keep the secret. Listen, put your head close to mine and I will tell you the story. Haynes mustn't know. Do you hear? He is my enemy and he watches me. That other man used to watch me too, and he tied ropes—ropes that cut, round my wrists and ankles. He caught me by the river that night. I was walking with Bob—I wonder where Bob is now; he was a nice little dog, and well-bred. You would have liked him, Betty. He was a game little chap, and he used to hunt those big water-rats on the bank of the river."

Jack's voice died away into an almost unintelligible whisper, and Elizabeth hoped that his thoughts were being diverted into a safe channel, but, when she tried to question him about the long-dead fox-terrier, he turned upon her angrily and dragged his hand away from her caressing fingers.

"Why do you interrupt me?" he cried. "Why do you try and stop me? You must listen, I say, you must. I remember it all now—all. Don't speak to me, Betty, and I will tell you everything from the beginning."

"Very well, Jack, I will listen," the other answered, but although she tried to speak calmly and soothingly, there was a nervous quiver in her voice and an expression of strained excitement in her eyes. Ever since her arrival in Luxor she had looked forward to this moment when the blind man should divulge the secrets of the past, but now that the time had come, she was conscious of a strange reluctance to

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listen to the story, and would have welcomed gladly any interruption.

But no interruption came and the hoarse, eager voice went on relentlessly. Every now and then Feilden paused, for a moment, and turned his head furtively from side to side, as if his blind eyes could detect the presence of eavesdroppers in the garden near at hand or in the shadowy corners of the verandah. Betty shivered involuntarily as she watched him, and the look of apprehension deepened in her pale face.

"Where had I got to? Oh, yes, I had gone out for a walk with Bob after dinner. There was a moon, a full moon, and it was quite light. We walked for a long way along the bank of the river, beyond Karnak, and we got to the place where I had been painting in the afternoon. Then something happened. I don't quite know what it was, but I was struck, thrown down and stunned. When I came round again I was lying on the ground, and I could not move."

He paused, and pressed his thin hands to his head, as if he were trying to remember clearly what had happened. After a minute's silence he went on again, speaking slowly and with hesitation.

"I was stiff and my head hurt confoundedly. I had been tied up with ropes. They were twisted round and round me, strapping my arms down to my sides—do you understand? And my feet were tied together too. A beastly filthy rag had been crammed into my mouth, but my eyes were not covered, and I could see—yes, I could see, then, quite plainly."

He paused once more. Betty leaned forward in her chair. The horrified interest was getting the

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better of the reluctance now in her mind, and she listened eagerly to every word.

"I was in a native house, one of those horrible, stuffy mud houses, and there was a girl huddled up in the corner, crying. I could see out of the house into a sort of yard. You know the kind of place, Betty. There was a mud wall round it, rubbish littered about all over the shop, and a big heap of green clover. A pariah dog was on the wall. It had yellow eyes, and it crouched down and howled. I can hear it now. In the corner of the yard there was a fire and a man was moving about near it. Every now and then he put brushwood upon it, and it smoked and blazed up. He was heating something in the fire, I could see the gleam of red-hot metal."

There was another long silence, and then the blind man resumed his narrative again, describing in slow, difficult speech the last scene upon which his eyes had rested.

As Elizabeth listened it all seemed to rise up before her eyes like a terrible, lurid picture. The dark, noisome hovel, the captive straining painfully at his cutting bonds, the weeping girl and the man outside in the red light of the flickering fire. She could see the fierce eyes of the pariah dog; the heat of the flaming brushwood seemed to be scorching her cheeks and the acrid smell of the smoke to be in her nostrils.

"It seemed a long time that I lay there," Jack went on. "But I suppose it was really only a few minutes. Once the girl left off crying and came out of her corner. She picked up a lantern that was standing on the ground and peered into my face; it was as if she wanted to see who I was. She was quite a little thing—a child, with black eyes."

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"Yes," Betty whispered. "Yes, yes."

"The man came in then, while the girl was bending over me, and he seized her arm and dragged her away. He looked as if he would like to have killed her; she crouched down again against the mud wall and cried. She went on crying and sobbing all the time after that, and I could hear her—all the time."

Jack's voice sank to a whisper, and then he roused himself and an expression of fierce excitement came into his sightless face.

It was getting dusk now, but no lamps had been lit. He and Betty were alone in their corner of the deserted verandah.

"He put out my eyes, he burnt them out with red-hot iron from the fire, and I was tied fast, hand and foot, so that I could not move. I bit the gag through and yelled for help, but nobody came, and then he held my throat in his hand and I could not scream any more. I fainted, I suppose, for that is all I can remember, and afterwards I was blind—blind—blind."

The grey head sank forward and the agitated, husky voice died away into silence. As she looked at him Betty felt a great passion of pity welling up in her heart and her eyes filled with tears.

She leaned forward and laid her hand gently on Jack's arm.

"Poor Jack," she whispered, "dear old Jack." He lifted his head, and she drew back with a shudder as she saw the spasm of rage that distorted his worn, haggard face.

"I don't want pity," he muttered, "it is revenge that I want. Yes, and I mean to have it, too. I saw him once, the man with the scar, before he put out my eyes, and, although I am blind, I should

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know him again anywhere; and I saw the girl as well—the girl who had the two-shilling piece in her hand.”

“What do you mean, Jack? I don’t understand,” Elizabeth whispered, but Feilden took no notice of the interruption.

“She was holding it in her hand, and when she came near with the lantern, I saw it quite distinctly. She was the man’s wife, Betty, and it was because of her that it all happened. Some fellow, an Englishman—damn him!—had given it to her. He had been fooling with her, you see, kissing her, or something, and her husband, the man with the scar, mistook me for him. He never found out his mistake, but the girl knew. I got to understand all this, bit by bit, as I learnt their lingo, and it was the girl who helped me to get away at last—the man’s wife, I mean. She cut the ropes and I got away. I don’t remember very clearly, but it was near the river, and I climbed down the bank and dipped my hand into the water to see which way it was flowing. I knew that the place where they had kept me was north of Luxor. I crawled along the bank and hid in a field, and then Haynes found me and brought me here.” Jack paused for a moment, as if to recover his breath, and then went on again.

“I liked Haynes at first, and thought him a good sort of chap, but I loathe him now. It is because he watches me, watches me and spies upon me all the time. I hate him, and I hate the man with the scar. Yes, I hate them both, but—come closer to me, Betty, nobody must hear what I say.” He gripped her arm violently and drew her nearer to his side. “I hate most of all that other man, the Englishman, who began everything, whose fault it

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all was, the man who gave the two-shilling piece to the girl. That man is my enemy, and some day I shall find him. I swear to you that I will find him, and then he shall be killed, for he deserves to die. Think of all that he made me suffer. The hot sun, and the flies, and the ropes. Ten years of it all, ten years in that vile place, ten years. That man ought to be tortured, as I was, and he ought to die, and to go to hell for ever and ever."

Feilden's grasp on Elizabeth's arm relaxed and he leaned back wearily against the cushions of his chair.

All the terrible vindictiveness and cruelty seemed suddenly to have died out of his face and nothing but hopeless misery and utter exhaustion remained. He did not move nor speak when Betty rose to her feet and stood for a moment looking down at him with horror and despair in her wide eyes, and he did not notice when she moved silently away and left him alone. He was back again, once more, in the past, with the blazing sun beating down upon his head and the bonds chafing his thin wrists. He moved restlessly in his chair, and the worn features twitched painfully. Every now and then he muttered a few words to himself in a broken, indistinct whisper: "He shall be tortured, yes, I swear it, and he shall die and burn in hell for ever and ever."

As for Elizabeth, she fled away upstairs to her own room, and did not pause until the door was locked behind her and she was cowering on her knees at the open window, with her face buried in her trembling hands. As she recalled Jack's words, to which she had just been listening, long shudders shook her from head to foot, and she felt as if she

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were dazed and bewildered by some sudden and tremendous shock.

The curtain, which for so long had shrouded the past, had been swept aside ruthlessly, and it was impossible for her to realise all at once the fresh miseries which stood revealed.

She knew the secret at last, knew it, indeed, as nobody else could know it, for in the light of the events of the previous day, and with Kerr's little anecdote about the broken water jar fresh in her mind, it was almost as clear to her as if the series of events which had led up to Jack's imprisonment, had been related to her in the form of a consecutive narrative.

Kerr had been the cause—the innocent cause—of the whole tragedy. He was the man who had given the silver coin to the little Arab girl on that evening, ten years ago, and poor Jack, by some strange error, had suffered the long imprisonment in his place.

There could be no possibility of doubt about it all. The two stories fitted into one another with fatal exactitude, and, as she realised this, two separate convictions forced their way into Betty's mind—Kerr must never learn the truth, and all her own dreams and hopes of happiness must be abandoned for ever.

There was no need for any further consideration or indecision. It was her part, surely, to attempt to expiate, in some measure, the wrong which her lover had unknowingly wrought, to make up to Jack for his unmerited misery, and to pledge herself to a life of endless sacrifice.

The very arguments which Kerr had used in defence of his own claims turned themselves against

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him now, for, had he not said that mistakes, as well as sins, had their penalties, and was it not his mistake for which she now proposed to make atonement?

Elizabeth did not hesitate any longer. Her choice was taken, her mind made up, absolutely. It only remained for her now to tell Kerr of the decision, to bid him farewell, and to dismiss him without a word of excuse or of explanation.

She leaned her fair head wearily against the wooden ledge of the window and bitter tears welled up into her eyes. Fate was very cruel, she told herself, and very relentless. They three, Kerr, Jack and she, herself, had been played with and shifted backwards and forwards, ruthlessly, as if they had been merely the pieces on a gigantic chess-board. It had all been wanton, unnecessary and unjust. Jack had spent ten years, the ten best years of his life, in bearing the punishment of another man's mistake, and now she and Kerr, who loved each other so dearly, were to be parted for ever, and she was destined to take the heavy burden of expiation on to her own shoulders.

Kerr must go away—Betty shivered as she recalled Jack's savage words and threats—he must go away at once, and she, in the meantime, must do all in her power to encourage the blind man in his determination to keep his cherished secret, and then in a little while they would go home to England. She shivered again as she thought of the future which lay before her and Jack. Poor Jack, she would be able to give him pity at anyrate, if she could not give him love, but what would that be worth in comparison with the cruel injuries which he had endured?

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And then, suddenly, a girl's voice, sweet and clear, rang out on the hot evening air. It was little Mabel Gale singing in the garden, and the plaintive words of her song seemed to find their echo in Betty's aching heart:

“Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone.”

CHAPTER XVII

GLADYS NORTON congratulated herself not a little on her splendid fortune as she strolled away towards the hotel, after her interview with Kerr and Elizabeth, and she determined that she would lose no time in putting her newly-acquired knowledge to good account.

Miss Cathcart was her rival and her enemy, she had told herself this again and again—little suspecting how unimportant and uninteresting her petty jealousies and animosities were in the eyes of the other woman—and she deserved to be punished for her disgusting airs and graces, her stand-offishness and her haughty ways.

Ever since the day of their arrival at Luxor Miss Norton had been waiting for a chance of paying off these old scores, and now, quite unexpectedly, the desired opportunity had appeared.

She had, as she termed it to herself, found out the superior Miss Cathcart, and had discovered that the conceited creature was not quite so immaculate as she pretended to be. There could be no doubt now that she had been flirting outrageously with Major Kerr, when all the time she was poor, dear Mr Feilden's promised wife. Gladys's eyes sparkled spitefully as she reflected upon the interesting scandal which could be evolved from the little episode of which she had just been a delighted witness.

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Had she not actually beheld the culprits standing hand-in-hand beneath the palm trees? Had she not noted Elizabeth's startled blush and the evident annoyance in Kerr's stern face? Was it not positive that an understanding of some sort existed between the pair? A clandestine engagement! And, moreover, was it not quite likely—delightful thought—that they had even been planning the details of a speedy elopement?

The young lady felt that her heart was burning with virtuous indignation, and she resolved that, at all events, she would not allow poor, ill-used Mr Feilden to be deceived, nor would she, by her silence, aid and abet the guilty couple in their misdemeanours.

She could, indeed, hardly conceal her triumph and delight as she sauntered along with her head full of schemes and glorious anticipations.

Her cheeks were flushed, a satisfied smile parted her red lips, and the fingers that held up the muslin flounces of her dress trembled with excitement.

Fortune was certainly smiling upon her at last, for here, ready to her hand, was the opportunity for which she had longed, the opportunity of killing two—or even three—birds with one stone, the opportunity which should enable her to humiliate Elizabeth, annoy Kerr, and, at the same time, further her own ambitious plans with regard to Jack Feilden.

"Mrs John Feilden—Gladys Emmeline Feilden." It seemed to her that she could almost see the words in neat copper-plate on visiting-cards, and inscribed in her own sweeping signature at the conclusion of notes and letters. It was a good name, Feilden. She preferred it to Norton any day, and then would not it carry with it the certainty of all manner of delightful and desirable things?

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A country house, an assured position, a lavish dress allowance. Oh, there would be no end to the joys and possessions which would be hers when once she was fairly married to Jack, and, at present, she could see no obstacle in the way of the ultimate attainment of her wishes.

It was a well-known and undisputed fact that hearts were frequently caught in the rebound. What was more likely then than that Feilden, blind and helpless as he was, should turn to her for comfort and sympathy in his misfortune? Gladys felt that she was quite competent to administer the required consolation, and it was with high hopes and plenty of self-assurance that, a little later in the afternoon, she sought out the object of her attentions, and proceeded to open his eyes, gently but firmly, to the deceptions and short-comings of his betrothed.

Feilden's behaviour was not, however, at all what the young lady had anticipated. The interview was a most unsatisfactory one, and when, at last, she retired from the scene, it was with the knowledge that her mission had been a failure and that nothing but defeat and discomfort had been her portion. And at first everything had seemed to be so very simple.

She had found Feilden alone in the verandah—it was a few minutes after Elizabeth had left him—and seating herself at his side in a comfortable chair, she had embarked upon her subject without any preamble or delay.

“Oh, Mr Feilden, dear Mr Feilden, I have been so surprised, so shocked. I hardly know how to tell you about it, and yet I realise that it is my duty, my painful duty. It would be wrong to think of my own feelings in the matter, and it is a shame that you should be deceived and hoodwinked in this way.”

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After that speech it had not taken long to put Jack into possession of all the facts. There had been a few veiled hints and innuendoes; the little scene in the garden had been described, some lurid details and suppositions had been skilfully inserted, and then a gentle hand had been laid on Feilden's arm, which was intended to palliate the victim's sufferings, and, at the same time, to indicate the direction in which solace might be discovered.

It was at this point that Jack proceeded to show himself in what was—to Miss Norton—a completely new light, for he got up from his seat, shook off the consoling hand roughly, and reproached her for her interference and impertinence in no measured terms.

All that was generous and chivalrous in the blind man's nature seemed to come to the surface once again. His old instincts were revived, his old impulses were awakened, and, detecting the malice and jealousy that underlay the mischief-maker's smooth speeches, he refused to hear a word against the character of the woman he loved.

"Your story is absurd," he declared. "Remember, please, that Kerr is my friend and Miss Cathcart is my future wife. You had better be more careful how you speak against either of them, and I should advise you, Miss Norton, to be careful, too, how you repeat this infamous scandal; although, naturally, nothing that you can say would injure Miss Cathcart in the least. You will excuse me, I do not wish to hear any more gossip, and I do not believe a single word that you have said."

There was a manliness and a simple dignity in Feilden's words and demeanour that amazed Miss Norton. It was as if some strange metamorphose

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had come over him, and, for the moment, all the weakness and petty selfishness that marred his character had disappeared. As she watched him groping his way into the house, with that new expression of scorn and indignation on his haggard face, she began to wonder whether it would not be advisable to abandon her grand scheme and betake herself to the fascinations and novelties of Aswán or Khartoum.

But Gladys's disappointment was not of very long duration, and, later on in the evening, she had occasion to reconsider her decision and to wonder whether, after all, her disclosures to Feilden were not beginning to bear the desired fruit.

The blind man was undoubtedly moody, sullen and irritable, although he refused to listen to the doctor's suggestions that he should retire to his own room. It was, besides, apparent to everyone that his manner towards Kerr had changed completely, and that he treated his former friend with a surliness and curt rudeness that was quite unprecedented.

Miss Norton had another cause for self-congratulation in the fact that Elizabeth did not make her appearance during the evening, and she had great hopes that Feilden would also recognise this conduct as a sign of guilt. Altogether her spirits and hopes were speedily rising to their former high level, and she little suspected that, by her move in revealing Betty's secret to Jack, she had, in reality, only succeeded in playing into her enemy's hands and in furthering her desires.

Now that Elizabeth had finally made her choice and decided upon her course of action, she had only one conscious desire in her heart, and that was

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that Kerr should go away from Luxor without delay.

She longed for his departure with a feverish eagerness and impatience, and her great dread was that Feilden should place obstacles in the way of the fulfilment of her wish.

While the mad Arab was at liberty she knew that Kerr's life must be in danger, for she was convinced that the rope-maker had, at last, discovered the identity of the man who had done him the supposed injury ten years ago; and yet, at the same time, she dreaded to hear of the capture of the lunatic, for might he not, insane as he was, yet have sense and understanding enough to reveal the secret which it must be her one aim in life to keep concealed.

The realisation that the man whom she loved so dearly had been the cause of Jack's sufferings and imprisonment seemed to have well-nigh broken her heart, and she was resolved that, whatever happened, Kerr himself should never share her knowledge.

He must go away. That was the only solution of the problem, and Miss Norton, by poisoning the blind man's mind against his friend, removed one of Betty's most pressing difficulties and made her plans for her lover's safety and peace of mind more easy of accomplishment than she had dared to expect.

Kerr had himself decided to leave Luxor on the morrow for a time, at least, whatever Elizabeth's answer might be, and when he saw Feilden alone on the verandah, after dinner, he joined him with the object of breaking the news of his imminent departure.

"I'm off to-morrow, you know, up the river," he said quietly, expecting the burst of indignation that had always followed similar proposals, for although

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he had noticed that Jack had avoided him during the evening, he was by no means prepared for a ready acquiescence in his plans.

"The poor chap is queer again to-night, very queer," he said to himself. Like Rose Brown he had, of late, begun to suspect that there was something seriously wrong with the blind man's mental condition and that he was hardly responsible, at times, for his own words and actions.

These suspicions had, in a measure, influenced him when he urged Betty to break off her engagement, and they returned to him now with renewed force as he sat there on the dusky verandah with Jack, silent and moody, at his side. They would have been confirmed beyond doubt or question had it been possible for him to read the wild thoughts that were passing in giddy succession through his companion's disordered brain.

In spite of his burst of indignation Miss Norton's words and insinuations were already beginning to have their effect upon Feilden's mind, and as he brooded over his wrongs, desperate notions of revenge came to him, and voices—strange, distant voices—whispered evil suggestions of punishment and murder into his ears.

It seemed to him that his enemies, the Arab captor, Haynes, the unknown man who had been the cause of all his miseries, and now Kerr himself, were watching him with fixed, glassy eyes.

Ghostly visions flitted through his mind, hideous faces mocked at him. He could hear peals of jeering laughter, and it was as if mysterious influences were prompting him and urging him forward.

The vivid memory of his injuries and tortures swept back upon him again as they had done while

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he was telling Betty the story of his captivity. He knew quite well that it was all over and done with, that he was safe amongst friends, and yet, surely the ropes were still on his wrists, the intolerable thirst was scorching his throat, and the flies, which his bound hands could not brush away, were settling with maddening persistency upon his face and upon his unseeing eyes.

Jack clenched his hands tightly and pressed his lips together in the effort to keep back the bitter words and groans of anguish that were striving for utterance.

"Good-night, old man, and good-bye. Here is Haynes coming to look for you, and I shall be off early to-morrow morning. We'll meet again, in England, later on."

The blind man forced himself to take the proffered hand and to murmur a few words of farewell, but, all the time, his fingers were twitching and there was fierce anger and hatred in his heart.

As he walked, with stumbling, uncertain steps, into the hotel, he turned his face restlessly from side to side as if he were trying to elude the gaze of watchful eyes.

Kerr stayed on for some time in the verandah after Feilden had left him, meditating as to what could have occasioned the strange and complete alteration in the blind man's attitude towards him.

Hitherto Feilden had always seemed to be so anxious for his companionship, so dependent on his goodwill and ready sympathy, but now, to-night, he had hardly treated him with the most ordinary civility.

Could it all be put down to the caprice of an

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invalid—the senseless whim of a man who was mentally unsound?

There was pity, mingled with a faint contempt, in Kerr's face as these thoughts passed through his mind, and then he went on to think about Elizabeth and to wonder what answer she would give to him on the morrow.

He had been speaking to Haynes during the afternoon, and the doctor had told him that he was anxious to get his patient to England at once, without waiting for the spring, as had, at first, been arranged.

“Poor Feilden is stronger, certainly, in some ways,” he had said; “but in other respects—” And Kerr had had no difficulty in finishing the sentence for himself and in divining the reason for the proposed journey.

Certainly, as far as he and Miss Cathcart were concerned, this immediate return to England would simplify matters considerably.

Poor Jack must be guarded, as far as possible, from pain and excitement, and it would probably be thought desirable that, for his sake, there should, at present, be no formal breaking off of the engagement, but it did not need a very acute intelligence to realise that, in his present mental condition, Elizabeth's relations would not, for a moment, think of allowing the marriage to take place.

“He is nearly off his head already,” Kerr said to himself, “and probably, by the time he gets to England, it will be necessary to put him, more or less, under restraint.” And then his thoughts wandered away to his own plans and his own future.

He must go away for a time whatever happened. It would make things easier and more comfortable for Elizabeth, and then, a little later on, he would

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follow her to England. He did not intend to be impatient, he would not try to hurry her too much, but perhaps in the autumn, when matters had disentangled themselves, and when her engagement to poor Feilden was a thing of the past—and at this point Kerr caught himself up with a half smile at his own presumption.

He was being impatient already, he was being over-confident of the answer that Betty would give him on the morrow, he was making too sure of his own happiness.

Supposing that disappointment was in store for him, supposing that, after all, Betty refused to listen to his arguments and elected to remain faithful to her worn-out promises of ten years ago?

Kerr's mouth was set firmly beneath his thick moustache as he thought over all the possibilities of the position. If Elizabeth's answer proved to be "No" instead of "Yes" he would have to go away just the same, there was no other alternative, but it should be a longer absence, and then he took a letter which he had received that evening from a man at Aswán, and read it for the second time.

"Nelson has fallen through at the last moment. Why don't you come with us and take his place? Everything is ready. We go up to Khartoum to-morrow and leave there on the twenty-fifth. There will be any amount of shooting, and the whole thing would suit you down to the ground, if you care to come."

Kerr re-folded the letter and put it back into his pocket. Yes, whatever happened, he would go up as far as Khartoum and see his friend off on his long

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journey into the interior, and then, supposing that Betty refused him, here was a programme for the future all ready to his hand. As the letter said, the long expedition into the interior of Africa, with its adventures and dangers, would be exactly to his taste, but yet he felt sure—almost sure—that he should not make one of the party. He got up from his seat, and as he strolled out and paced up and down the moonlit garden path, it seemed to him that he was back once again in the dark, inner shrine of the temple of Ptah, and that Elizabeth was standing with her sweet, quivering face near to his.

He could see her eyes, as he had seen them then, in the dim light of the flaring match, he could feel the soft touch of her lips, and he could hear her voice in his ears.

“I love you, I love you, I love you.” That was what she had said, and, surely, there could be no doubt now as to what was the answer that she meant to give him.

It was a beautiful morning, windless, clear and exquisitely cool and fresh, when Betty came out of the hotel on the following morning at about eight o'clock. Kerr joined her, and they walked together down the village street and towards the temple.

There was plenty of bustle and confusion, even at that early hour, on the river bank, for a large steamer had come in and the tourists were on the point of starting out on a long excursion.

The air was full of the sound of high-pitched voices and the vociferous clamour of the donkey-boys. The vendors of antiquities were already busy at their stalls, and lines of donkeys were drawn up at the side of the road. A man came along

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swinging a silver censer as he walked, and a dark-eyed child proffered fragrant bouquets of heliotrope and roses.

Kerr had cast one glance at his companion's troubled face when they first met, and then he had begun to talk on the most ordinary and commonplace topics, as if this interview were to be quite an everyday affair, and as if there were no vital and absorbing subject to be discussed between them.

He was anxious to set Elizabeth at her ease, for although he could not guess at the reason for her manifest distress, he was, nevertheless, certain that something had occurred to agitate and disturb her since their conversation of the previous day.

She hardly seemed to listen to his words, however, as they walked slowly through the crowd in the direction of the temple gate, and it was not until they were in the great open court, and away from the pushing throngs of tourists and natives, that she stopped and turned to him abruptly.

"That man—have they caught him yet? The mad Arab? "

"No," said Kerr, "not yet, I'm sorry to say, but there is no need for you to be bothered about it. The police are certain that they will have him in a few days. You were evidently quite right, by the way, in your idea that our lunatic and the rope-maker were one and the same person. The fellow seems to be a well-known character and to have been more or less of a mystery for years. He and his wife—that woman was his wife, it appears—have vanished entirely since the day before yesterday—since we last saw them, in fact—but it is positive that they will be found before long and then the poor wretch will be shut up somewhere safely."

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Betty shivered. Her face looked wan and miserable in the clear light. Kerr went on with his story.

"He attacked the guardian of the temple before he came after me. I told you that I could not make out where the man had got to, well, he was found later on, quite unconscious, with a fearful bruise on his head. He's getting on now all right, and he will recover, but it was a near shave. You will hear everyone talking about the affair, I expect, but nobody need hear of our little adventure. You would, I know, hate all the gossip and foolish questions. It will be all right, I can assure you of that. The lunatic will be caught in a day or two, and that will be the end of the matter as far as we are concerned. I have arranged that the woman shall be looked after and rewarded. She most certainly saved our lives the other night, and as for the wretched husband, he will never trouble anyone again. There can be no possible doubt as to his insanity, you see. It is not as if he had any grievance against me, or against that poor gaffir, for the matter of that. The whole thing was so utterly purposeless and idiotic."

They had walked on while he was speaking, and now they had reached the middle of the temple and were standing in the old Coptic church.

Before them were the remains of the altar, with its incongruous marble pillars, and above, on the wall, could be seen traces of the coarsely-painted frescoes with which the delicate reliefs of Amen-hotep had been covered and obliterated.

Opposite the altar recess, and above the low wall, the clustered shafts of the great columns stood thickly, and through them, as if one were looking down an avenue of forest trees, was a glimpse of the

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ruined pylon and the graceful, white minaret of the mosque.

As always in Luxor, pigeons fluttered hither and thither, and the screaming kites wheeled and swooped against the blue sky.

There was nobody near Kerr and Elizabeth in that part of the temple, for it was still early. For a moment or two they stood in silence, and then Kerr stretched out his hand and touched the woman's arm gently. She started as if she had been suddenly awakened from some unhappy but absorbing dream.

There could be no doubt that she was strangely nervous and agitated this morning, and there was a hopeless, stricken look about her, as if she had experienced some terrible and crushing blow.

There was a wistful expression in her eyes and her lips quivered pathetically. Her whole figure seemed to be drooping and shrinking, and, every now and then, she cast scared, apprehensive glances over her shoulder, as if she were fearful of some approaching danger.

Kerr marvelled as he remembered the courage and presence of mind which this woman had displayed when they had stood together waiting for what had seemed to be certain death, and he was quite at a loss to understand the meaning of her present mood and the change which had come over her since the previous day.

It was certain, however, that no good purpose could be served by delay; for, whatever happened, he had arranged to leave for Aswán that morning.

"I want you to speak to me," he said. "I am going away to-day and we have not very much time. Tell me, Elizabeth, have you thought about what I

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said to you? Are you ready to give me your answer?"

Betty's hands had been hanging listlessly at her side, but she brought them together now with a quick movement and held them clasped tightly against her breast.

"No," she cried, "no, no, no. That is my answer, Major Kerr. I have nothing else to say to you, except that you must go away now, at once, and never see me or speak to me again."

She spoke hurriedly, almost violently, and then coming nearer she laid her hands on his arm.

"And you will go at once, to-day. You understand, do you not, that I wish you to go? I wish it more than anything, for I can never desert Jack. You must not try to persuade me, you must not ask me any questions. I have nothing to say, nothing to explain. My answer is 'No,' just that—'No, no.'"

Kerr took her trembling hands in his very gently, and begged her at least to give him some reason for her refusal, but it was all of no avail. Although she listened in a kind of dull apathy to his words, they had no effect upon her, and her resolution remained unshaken.

She did not pretend that she did not love him or that she cared for Jack Feilden. She did not make any attempt to defend herself or to excuse her decision, but she repeated again and again that her answer was "No," and she begged him to go away and to leave her for ever.

"I did not know yesterday, but I know now, I am certain—quite certain. It would be wrong to marry you and to leave poor Jack, and you cannot want me to do what I know is wrong. Oh, please

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go, that is all that I have to say—indeed, it is all, and I will stay here and try to make Jack happy.”

“You will never be able to make him happy,” Kerr urged again, “and you will be miserable yourself. It is all a mistake, a terrible mistake, and you will find that out for yourself before long.”

An idea had come to him as he listened to her pleading words, and he was certain now that he had fathomed the reason for her agitation and for the change that had come over her since their last meeting.

Miss Norton, no doubt, was at the root of all the trouble, for had she not spied upon them in the garden? And what more likely than that she should hasten to pour out the tidings of her discovery into Feilden’s ears?

Kerr remembered the blind man’s sullen demeanour and the complacency with which the news of his approaching departure had been received. He recollected, moreover, that Elizabeth had been absent from dinner and had not appeared downstairs during the evening.

Was it not easy, with her changed, weary face before him, to picture what had happened? Jack’s jealousy and anger had, no doubt, been awakened by Miss Norton’s story. He had had an interview with his betrothed, and appealing to her pity, her pride, and her memories of the past, he had succeeded in wringing from her a solemn promise that she would remain true to her old vows and that she would dismiss his rival from her presence for ever.

Knowing, as he did, Feilden’s emotional and self-centred nature, Kerr could almost imagine the words in which the appeal would have been made

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and the sentimental and hysterical arguments which would have been employed.

He felt positive that his theory was the correct one, for it seemed to explain exactly what had taken place, and Elizabeth's next words only served to confirm him in his belief.

"You will go, promise me that you will go, at once, for nothing will ever make me alter my mind. I must stay with Jack, and, even if he were to refuse to marry me, I could never, never be your wife!"

Elizabeth hardly realised the hopeless finality of her speech, for her only desire was to ensure Kerr's departure at all costs; but still, at the same time, she meant every word that she was saying.

As long as Jack lived she must devote her life to him, and the man she loved—the man in whose place Jack had suffered—could have no place in her heart.

Kerr did not attempt to plead his cause any longer.

"Very well," he said, "you shall have your wish, Elizabeth, I will go away to-day. I promised that I would not worry you if your answer should be 'No,' and I will keep my word. So this is to be the end of it all, is it? And since yesterday I have been hoping for something very different. I do not mean to reproach you, dear, it is not your fault, I know that quite well. We will say good-bye now, but you must remember one thing, and it is this: always, and whatever happens, I shall love you, as I do now."

Betty was looking up at the blue sky above the columns and a great relief had come into her eyes. Her restless agitation seemed to have vanished completely, and she turned to Kerr, after a moment's silence, with a wistful smile on her lips.

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"And I too," she whispered softly, "I shall love you always. It may be wrong, but I cannot help that, always—always."

"I shall go up to Khartoum," Kerr went on, breaking another long silence. "I had a letter from a man yesterday. He is going to do a bit of shooting and exploring in the interior, and he wants me to join him. We shall be away a long time—a year, perhaps, or more. Supposing"—a sudden light flashed into his eyes, for he had seen the quiver of pain that crossed Betty's face as she listened to his words—"supposing that you should change your mind for any reason. Supposing that, when you have time to consider things, you should want me to come back. I am not starting immediately. I shall be in Khartoum for a few days. If you write to me there, by this day week, the letter would catch me, but, after that, it would be too late."

Betty nodded her head drearily. "Yes," she said, "I can promise you that much. If I need you—if you can help me, I will write to you at Khartoum. But it is no use. I shall not change, I shall not need you, I have made up my mind."

It was a long time before Kerr spoke again, and then his words came slowly and with some hesitation. He never took his eyes from the woman's pale, sad face.

"Perhaps," he said, "it may be a longer time than we think before I come back from this expedition. There will be dangers, naturally, and who knows what may happen? Elizabeth, my love, in case we should never see each other again, will you say good-bye to me, and kiss me once, before I go away?"

She lifted her head obediently. It was good-bye. Most likely they would never meet again, and they

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loved each other very dearly. Surely there could be no disloyalty to poor Jack now, when she was going to devote her whole life to his happiness. Kerr took her face between his hands and kissed the white lips again and again. Then he turned away, and she listened to the sound of his footsteps growing fainter and fainter as he passed out between the columns and crossed the great, sunlit courtyard beyond.

She was alone—quite alone. He had gone away. He had left her and she should never, never see him again. Elizabeth had been standing motionless until the last echo of her lover's departing footsteps had died away, but now she ran forward with outstretched hands and quivering lips. She could not let him go yet, it was too hard, too cruel. She must call him back for one last word, one last farewell. Then she stopped, and turning, went back to the place where they had stood together a few minutes ago. She seated herself on a fallen block of stone, and leaning forward, covered her face with her hands.

A little crested hoopoo tripped across the sand at her side, white pigeons fluttered backwards and forwards, and the kites wheeled in great circles overhead.

CHAPTER XVIII

“WHAT on earth is the matter with you to-day, Betty? Why are you so silent and miserable all of a sudden? Is it because Kerr has gone away? I want to ask you about Kerr. It seems to me that you have been seeing a bit too much of that fellow. People will begin to talk. For the matter of that, they have begun to talk already, and no wonder. Why don't you answer me? It is no use to say nothing and try to deceive me. I am not a fool, if I am blind, and I believe that you have been flirting with that brute Kerr. I can tell that there is something the matter by your voice. I knew it directly you came in and began to read to me. I am not an idiot, I tell you. You all try to treat me like a child, but it is no good. I am not a fool, and I hate all this humbug. You were supposed to come out here to marry me, but it was all pretence—a piece with everything else. A piece with everything else. It has been put off and put off, and now I believe that you mean to throw me over. You are all plotting against me, you and Haynes, and now that cad Kerr, but I won't put up with it any longer. Kerr shall answer for this. It is he that has done all the mischief, he that has turned you against me.”

Elizabeth wrung her hands together desperately, for she felt that it was almost impossible for her to bear the torture of this interview any longer. She had stayed in the temple until she knew that Kerr's

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train would have left Luxor, and then, when she did return to the hotel, it was to find Haynes waiting in the verandah with a message to the effect that Feilden was anxious to see her immediately.

For more than an hour now she had been subjected to the blind man's cross-examination, and forced to listen to his bitter reproaches and complaints. He had spent the night in brooding over his wrongs, and now was rapidly working himself up into a passionate frenzy of rage and jealousy.

Every word that he said was intolerable to Elizabeth, and every fresh accusation seemed to stab at her heart.

He was right, she told herself remorsefully. Yes, although he must never know the truth, he was doubtless right to be incensed against her and against Kerr. Had not she failed utterly to give him the love that he deserved after all the cruel sufferings which he had endured? Had she not put Kerr into his place, and, moreover, was it not to Kerr that Jack owed his miseries and hardships?

She stood there before him, listening patiently to his furious speeches, and trying again and again to soothe the fury of his anger, and she was thankful that he was blind and so could not see her shamed, burning face and tear-filled eyes.

"You never meant to marry me," Feilden went on, "never. You are sick of me, and you would be glad—yes, it is true, do not deny it—you would be glad if I were dead. You say that you will marry me in May, but you don't mean it. When May comes you will put it off again. It's a farce, yes, that's what it is, a farce, and you are all of you making horrible plots against me, and laughing at me behind my back."

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His voice broke hysterically, and he leaned back in his chair. Betty knelt down, with a sudden impulse, and took the scarred hands in hers. She had made up her mind what to do, and there was a ring of something that was very like triumph in her voice.

"Jack, dear," she said, "you must not say these things, for they are not true. Believe me, they are not true in the least. I will marry you whenever you like, dear. To-day, to-morrow—I do not mind, I am ready, but you must never doubt me nor be angry with me again."

She stooped down and kissed the hand that she was holding very gently, as if in testimony to the truth of her words. Jack started forward and gripped her slender shoulders fiercely.

It was difficult, nay, almost impossible, at that moment to believe that he was blind, so animated was his expression and so strange the manner in which his sightless eyes seemed to search her face.

"You mean it?" he cried hoarsely. "You are not joking, Betty, you mean what you say? You promise it? Well, then, I will take you at your word. Oh, Betty, Betty, my darling, you are sure it is true?"

"Yes, dear, I mean it," Elizabeth answered, and then Jack went on, his excitement growing in intensity every moment.

"It was all lies, then, that that woman told me yesterday about you and Kerr—all lies and nonsense. I might have known it was not true. I was a brute to believe it for a second. You love me, darling, only me. You have promised to marry me, and I am the happiest man in the whole world."

He put his arms round her and kissed her many times, and although Betty shivered, she did not

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make any resistance. It was all part of her destiny, part of the penalty of Kerr's innocent wrong-doing. Her life of sacrifice and atonement had already begun.

There was, as may be imagined, no little amazement and consternation when the news of the approaching marriage became known, and Rose Brown did everything in her power to shake her sister-in-law's sudden and completely unexpected resolve.

For some time now she had suspected that there was something seriously wrong with Feilden's mental condition, and she did not hesitate to make common cause with Dr Haynes to prevent the marriage from taking place.

It was absurd, she declared vehemently, the whole idea was ridiculous and outrageous, but Elizabeth was deaf to all arguments, and she disregarded alike Rose's attempts at persuasion and the doctor's commands and advice.

Jack wished her to marry him at once, and Jack's word must be her law. Nothing should make her alter her mind or consent to a moment's unnecessary delay. Jack was ill, of course she knew that, and she was ready to devote herself to the task of nursing him back to health. His nerves were disordered, his mind was more or less unbalanced, he was subject to fits of melancholia. Very well, what difference did it all make? She was prepared for anything, and it was quite useless to attempt to move her from her resolve.

Finally, the wedding day was fixed for the following week, and although Rose wept in secret, and the doctor's face grew more and more grave and worried every hour, the arrangements and preparations for the ceremony went on apace.

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Old Nurse, also, was greatly disturbed at the turn which events had taken, and she did not hesitate to pour out her troubles into Mrs Brown's sympathetic ears.

"It do seem a shame, Miss Rose, that it do, to think as she won't 'ave no cake and no wedding-dress either, after all these years, too, and 'er as would look that beautiful in satin and orange blossoms. Not as it suits everyone, to be sure, and I'm bound to say, miss, as I never did see you look worse in your life than the day as you was married to Master George. What with that there heretic lace veil over your face, and white satin in the day-time being trying to a saller complexion at the best of times."

"Tell the truth and shame the devil" was one of Nurse's favourite maxims, and she was much too agitated to mince her words on the present occasion, but Rose was neither offended nor amused at the little woman's criticisms and reminiscences. She had not very much attention to spare for such minor considerations as an orange blossom wreath, a wedding cake, or an heirloom Honiton veil, but she was quite as troubled as Nurse herself, and would have done anything in her power to prevent the marriage from taking place.

The only person, except the bridegroom-elect, who was unfeignedly delighted with everything, was little Dot, and she could talk about nothing but the white frock which she was to wear as chief, and only, bridesmaid, the bouquet of pink roses that she was to carry, and the gold bangle that had been promised to her as a souvenir of the great occasion.

As to Feilden himself, he seemed to have gained a new lease of life on that morning when Betty promised to marry him forthwith, and all his old

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animation and high spirits had returned. He never wearied of talking about the happy future that was in store for him, and every visitor at the hotel was made the recipient of his confidences. Perhaps he may have been, at times, a little excited and noisy, but this was only natural in a man of his temperament, and his fits of depression and irritability were now things of the past. He even seemed to have forgotten his animosity towards Haynes and Kerr, for he and the doctor were once more good friends, and he made Betty wince several times by references to Kerr and by suggestions that he should be asked to return to Luxor in order to grace the festivities with his presence.

"The dear old chap ought to be my best man," he said once, "and if it were not that you, Betty, are so set on having the whole thing as quiet as possible, I should send him an invitation this very day."

And so things went on until the eve of the wedding day arrived, and still nothing had happened to make Elizabeth alter her mind or to fulfil the wishes of her friends that the marriage might be prevented, or, at anyrate, delayed until the return to England in the spring.

Rose Brown had decided, at last, to accept the inevitable, and she did it with a characteristic shrug of her graceful shoulders.

Betty was her dearest friend, and although the business was wretched and distasteful enough, it would be cruel to refuse to be present at the wedding, or to choose any vulgar and prominent manner of showing her disapproval. She had tried to use her influence, but it had been in vain, and now, as it was impossible to change the course of events, it would be advisable to resign herself to fate, and to make

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up her mind to do everything in her power to ensure the complete success of the festivities.

With these thoughts in her head Rose had worked valiantly through the hot hours of that last afternoon. Her own prettiest costume was in readiness, the last stitches had been set in Dot's bridesmaid's frock, the decorations of the church had been put in hand, and orders given for the preparation of the most beautiful white bouquet that the garden could produce.

Rose was tired out when her labours were finished, and it was with a sigh of relief that she set out, in the late afternoon, for a stroll along the bank of the river. Betty and Feilden had gone in that direction a short time before, and it was probable that she would meet them; but, anyhow, the fresh air would be pleasant after all the fatigues and worries of the long busy day.

She had not gone very far when her attention was arrested by the sound of footsteps on the road behind her. She looked back, and then stopped and waited while Dr Haynes came up and joined her.

Mrs Brown was not sorry to have a companion. Her thoughts were not particularly amusing this afternoon, for she was still troubled about Betty's future, but now that matters were irrevocably settled, the time for argument and misgiving was past, and she felt the need of encouragement and consolation.

Haynes was, undoubtedly, the proper person to administer the desired comfort, but his first words showed that there was no such intention in his mind.

"Have you seen Feilden, Mrs Brown? Is he with Miss Cathcart? Do you know if they came in this direction?"

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Rose threw out her hands with a little gesture of impatience.

"My dear Dr Haynes," she said, "really you are too foolish about Jack. Surely there cannot be any occasion for such immense care and caution. Mr Feilden is not a baby in arms, nor is my sister-in-law, and, in my opinion, they are both perfectly capable of taking care of themselves."

She tried to speak lightly, but there was an underlying note of anxiety in her voice, and this increased when Haynes did not attempt to answer or to contradict her statements.

"I believe that they usually come this way," he said quietly. "If you do not mind, Mrs Brown, I think we may as well go to meet them and walk home together. It is getting late, and I am naturally uneasy about my patient."

In the meantime Jack Feilden and Elizabeth had strolled further along the river bank than was their custom. They had passed the entrance to the temple, the landing-stages of the steamers, and the Arab boys with their stalls and trays of beads and antiquities.

Jack had been describing to Betty all the improvements and changes that he intended to make in his old Kentish home, and now he was enlarging upon the elaborate entertainments and rejoicings with which their return to England should be celebrated. His listener tried her best to respond in the same cheerful strain, and she had managed to infuse a certain brightness and animation into her voice, but, at the same time, her gait and demeanour were indescribably weary, and there was a wistful, haunted expression in her sweet face.

"A big dinner to the tenants, fireworks, marquees

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and no end of speeches. They shall all see that I am not an utter crock, even if I am blind, and there will always be you, darling, to back me up. We must send a letter to the mater in a day or two, and you may depend upon it that the people at home will do their share. I should not be in the least surprised if they put up triumphal arches, took the horses out of our carriage, and made no end of a fuss altogether."

Feilden had stopped in his walk to give full effect to his words, and was standing leaning on his stick, and with his left hand on Elizabeth's arm. The road is narrower at this point than it is in front of the temple. On one side there are houses, and on the other the ground slopes down to the Nile. The bank is high and very steep. It is built up with large, rough stones, and below it the native boats are moored. There is a pathway to the brink of the river, down which the women go to fill their heavy jars with water.

There were no Europeans in sight, just at present, from the place where Jack and Elizabeth were standing, but the road was thronged with natives. Some men were driving small, heavily-laden donkeys, water-sellers staggered along, stooping under the weight of their dripping goat-skins, and four or five girls sauntered towards the village with the wet goolahs on their heads gleaming in the low rays of the setting sun. There were the usual swarms of ragged, brown-skinned children playing in the warm dust, squabbling over scraps of sugar cane, or standing like little bronze statuettes with their fingers in their mouths and their solemn black eyes fixed on Elizabeth and her companion.

Elizabeth watched them all listlessly, and replied

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rather at random to the rhapsodies that Jack was pouring into her ears, but, after a time, her attention was arrested by a bustle and disturbance that seemed to be going on among a group of natives that had gradually collected at a little distance.

It was evident that there was something of interest to be seen, for the men were elbowing and pushing their way into the centre of the little crowd, while the children were beginning to gather, with delighted and inquisitive faces, on its outskirts. There was a steadily rising clamour of harsh, strident voices, and then, after a minute or two, a woman gave utterance to what was unmistakably a cry of fear and distress.

Elizabeth's anxiety was on the alert instantly, for she knew how necessary it was to keep Jack from any unaccustomed annoyance and excitement.

By now the crowd had increased with so much rapidity that it extended from side to side of the narrow road and completely barred the way back to the hotel. It might be necessary to return by the longer route through the village street, but Jack's pace was of necessity very slow, and the sun was already beginning to set behind the purple hills. In a few minutes it would be almost dark, and the prospect of the walk through the noise and confusion of the village, with the blind man as her only companion, was not a pleasant one. She glanced round with a worried expression in her clear eyes, but there was no European or policeman to be seen.

"Come, dear," she said, and as she spoke she drew Jack's hand further through her arm. "This way; it is getting quite late, and the others will be wondering what—" She stopped suddenly, and her voice died away into a horrified whisper, for the pushing crowd of black and blue-robed natives had parted

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for a moment, and she had caught a glimpse of a gaunt figure and a scarred, leering face.

Then she recovered herself with a great effort at self-control, and finished her sentence bravely.

"They will wonder what has become of us; they will think that we are lost. Come, Jack, we had better hurry on."

She tried to draw Feilden away gently as she spoke, but it was too late. The crowd, which had closed after that one transitory glimpse, opened once more, and the mad rope-maker, with a burst of the terrible savage laughter that she remembered so well, sprang out into the open. He had flung away his dark muffling cloak and was clad only in the blue cotton garment of the peasants. His disfigured face looked more sinister and ghastly than ever beneath the tightly-folded white turban. He called out something in a loud, violent voice, and he waved his clenched hands wildly above his head.

"Come, Jack, come," Betty pleaded, but the blind man paid no heed to her. He had raised his head, and was listening intently, with a strange tenseness in his face. One was reminded of a beaten dog who is suddenly arrested by the sound of the voice of his hated master.

The Arab spoke again. The fierce, vehement tones rang out harshly on the soft evening air, and then Feilden dragged himself away from Elizabeth's clinging grasp, and, throwing down his stick, stood there upright and unsupported on the dusty road.

His face seemed to be frozen into an expression of mingled fear and rage and loathing, and there was something indescribably horrible in his attitude, for it was as if he were crouching and shrinking in anticipation of a cruel blow. Betty remembered the

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scene in the moon-lit temple and shuddered involuntarily. Then she stepped in front of Jack and laid her hands once more on his arm.

"Come with me," she said, and her voice was as clear and as steady and gentle as ever. "It is all right, Jack dear, come with me."

Feilden flung her aside roughly, and then he turned to the rope-maker and burst out into a sudden torrent of fluent, vehement Arabic. It was as if the sound of his enemy's voice had roused him to a passion of frenzied hatred. As he spoke his attitude and whole demeanour changed completely, and now, instead of a slave cowering before a tyrant, he resembled a savage animal, a wild beast at bay—that is ready and eager for the attack. The next moment he sprang forward and flung himself with unexpected strength and fury upon the Arab. Feilden, the ten years' captive, and his tormentor had met at last.

The crowd of natives, shouting and gesticulating, pressed closely round Elizabeth, and divided her from the combatants, but they were all merely spectators. the affair was a show to them—an amusement—and they made no attempt to give, or to summon, assistance.

There was nothing but noise, and confusion, and stifling clouds of dust, which whirled up from beneath the trampling feet of those struggling figures. Elizabeth called wildly for help again and again, but she felt as if she were choked and blinded. It seemed ages, before, at last, she saw Rose Brown and Haynes appear round the corner of the road and hurry forward in answer to her agonised cries. She pressed her way into the crowd then, and tried, once more, to reach Jack's side, but it was in vain. She could see that his hands were at his enemy's throat, and

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she could see the straining movement of the fingers and the dark scars that encircled his wrists.

She could hear the Englishman's fierce, inarticulate shouts, and she could hear—quite clearly—the painful, laboured breathing of the other, as he strove to release himself from the clutch of those relentless hands.

It was the whole scene exactly as the fortune-teller had described it—the last picture in the crystal ball.

Here was the river bank, the men struggling together, and the pushing throng of onlookers. Some women with water jars on their heads gathered on the outskirts of the crowd, and a boy, leading his donkey by the bridle, stood on tip-toe and craned his brown face over a man's shoulder to see what was happening.

Betty called again, "Help! help! help!" but the words seemed to die away vaguely on her stiff lips.

As the combatants swayed backwards and forwards, still gripped tightly in each other's arms, they advanced inch by inch towards the unprotected edge of the road, and a strange hush of expectancy fell upon the close-packed throng of by-standers as they saw and realised the danger. Haynes, pale and breathless, flung himself into the crowd, but he was too late to prevent the catastrophe from taking place.

There was a sudden lurch towards the slippery edge of the road, a wild, shrill scream of terror, and then the two men, still locked in each other's arms, overbalanced, and disappeared together over the steep river bank.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Arab rope-maker was quite dead when he was brought up the steep bank from the edge of the river, for he had been beneath Feilden as the two men fell, and there were, besides, dark bruises—the marks of relentless fingers—on his lean throat. Jack Feilden was still alive.

Elizabeth, with Rose's supporting arm round her waist, stood motionless, as if she were in a stupor, watching, while they carried the limp, unconscious figure of the blind man up to the road, laid him upon an improvised stretcher and bore him away in the direction of the hotel. Then she drew a long breath, and pressing her hands to her forehead for a moment, as if trying to steady her thoughts, prepared to follow. Her face was set into stiff lines, and the horror of the sight which she had witnessed had not yet faded out of her eyes.

Several policemen had made their appearance on the scene by this time, and the eager, inquisitive crowd of onlookers was being rapidly dispersed. Men drew apart, in clusters of three or four, to talk over what had happened, and the women lifted the heavy water jars to their heads once more. It was evident that nobody was anxious to appear to have been implicated in any way in the tragic occurrence, and even the children retired to a distance, from which they stared, in round-eyed wonder, at the

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group of policemen and officials which had collected round the body of the dead man.

Rose shivered as they passed that blue-robed, prostrate form over which a native woman was stooping, and, as she glanced in that direction, she had a momentary glimpse of a pair of sorrowful dark eyes and the gleam of a silver ornament. Then she turned away and hurried her sister-in-law along the dusty road—in the wake of the melancholy little procession which, by now, was almost out of sight.

The whole affair was a complete mystery to Mrs Brown, for she had no clue to the meaning of the tragedy. She only knew that there had been some terrible catastrophe, or accident—that an Arab was dead, that Jack was dying—she felt certain of this, for she had seen his face as he was carried up the bank—and that there was nobody but herself upon whom poor Betty could depend in the dark hours that were at hand.

Rose felt unreasonably conscience-stricken, and almost as if she were herself to blame in some way for what had happened. She had tried so hard to prevent this marriage, she had been so bitterly disappointed when only failure had rewarded her efforts, and now, at the eleventh hour, Fate had stepped in and her wishes were to be fulfilled.

It was all ghastly and appalling. She was conscious of almost as much grief and horror as had been hers, ten years ago, on hearing the news of Feilden's supposed death, and these feelings were only intensified a little later when Dr Haynes met her outside the room into which the injured man had been carried, and told her that his condition was quite hopeless.

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"I cannot tell exactly how much he is hurt," Haynes said, "but, in his weakened state, the shock and the excitement would have been enough to kill him, without anything else. I am afraid that it is only a question of a few hours at the most."

"And Betty?" Rose whispered the words breathlessly, and the other nodded in response.

"Yes, she knows. It was impossible, of course, to keep anything from her. Will you come in, Mrs Brown, for a little while? It won't make any difference to the poor fellow, nothing can make any difference now, and she, Miss Cathcart, will like to have you with her."

Rose said nothing, but she followed the doctor into the room. Jack was lying on a couch near the open window, and Elizabeth was kneeling on the ground at his side.

All the savage hatred and fury had faded out of the blind man's haggard face, and, as he lay there, quiet and helpless, Rose thought that he looked, somehow, more like the old, boyish Jack Feilden than he had ever done since their arrival in Luxor. He was holding Betty's hand in his, and a little smile quivered about his white lips. Every now and then he said something, but his voice was so low and feeble that the words were hardly audible, except to Elizabeth herself.

It was growing dark, and the sky behind the palm trees was crimson with the after-glow. A soft breeze blew in at the window and stirred the disordered grey hair on the forehead of the dying man.

"We are going to be married, dearest," he murmured. "I have waited a long time—a long, long time, but the day has come at last, hasn't it,

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Betty? I thought you did not love me, but it was a mistake—all a mistake. I was a fool to think it. I know that now, dear, for you love me, and nothing would ever make you change."

He played with her hand as he spoke, caressing the slender fingers tenderly, and now, with a little smile, he drew off the diamond hoop which he had given her on the day of their betrothal, ten years ago.

"I have waited so long," he repeated, "so long." And then he slipped the ring gently back into its place upon the third finger of her left hand.

"'With this ring I thee wed,' " he whispered, "'with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.' Betty, my darling Betty, it is all right. You are my wife at last."

Elizabeth stooped down, and with her hand still in his she kissed his forehead softly. There was a long silence after that, and when he spoke again, some minutes later, it was in the impatient, querulous tones with which, during the past few weeks, she had become so sadly familiar.

"Why won't you sing to me, Betty? I have asked you so often and you always refuse. It is unkind of you, beastly unkind, for you know perfectly well that I would give anything to have you sing to me again."

He had raised his voice a little, and Rose could hear the words distinctly; she could see, too, the wistful pain and hopelessness in her sister-in-law's eyes.

"Poor Betty," she said to herself, as she realised to the full how hard it must be for Elizabeth to have to refuse what would be, in all probability, the last request of the man who had loved her so well and

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through so many weary years. "Poor, poor Betty."

"You always have some excuse," the feeble voice went on, "always some silly, rotten excuse. Why can't you be nice to me, Betty? Why can't you sing me the 'Skye Boat Song' just this once?"

There was a pause, and then Elizabeth gently disengaged her hand from the man's clinging grasp. A light had flashed into her face. It was, almost, as if an inspiration had come to her. She rose from her knees and stooped forward over Jack's couch.

"Very well, dear," she said, "you shall have your wish. I promise you that you shall hear the 'Skye' song. But you must be patient for a few minutes, Jack. You must wait while I go away and—and fetch the music."

"All right," muttered the other wearily, and then she went out of the room and closed the door noiselessly behind her. Haynes and Rose glanced at each other with wondering eyes, but they said nothing.

Betty entered the hall, glanced round it quickly, and then passed out on to the verandah. There was nobody there except a couple of white-robed Arab boys lounging at the entrance, and the expression of strained anxiety deepened in her blue eyes.

"Where can she be?" she whispered to herself, and then she hurried forward into the garden. After a few moments the pale gleam of a pink dress caught her eyes, between the trees, and a sigh of relief parted her lips.

Mabel Gale and Gladys Norton were sitting on one of the wooden benches with their heads close together. They were discussing the latest rumour of the accident, and they looked up with manifest

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surprise at Elizabeth's approach. She came straight towards them and laid her hand on Mabel's arm.

"Miss Gale," she said, "I have come to ask you to do something for me. Will you sing to Mr Feilden? There is a song, the 'Skye Boat Song,' that he is very anxious to hear."

Mabel rose from the seat, but before she could answer Miss Norton interposed brusquely. She had been quite certain, from the very first, that the reports of the mishap had been much exaggerated, and now Miss Cathcart's appearance and her request served to confirm these sanguine opinions. There could not, she told herself, be much the matter with Mr Feilden, if he was already wishing to be amused and asking for music. She twisted round in her seat, turning her shoulder rudely upon the newcomer.

"I wouldn't go, if I were you, Mabel," she said. "It is a great pity to make yourself too cheap. When Mr Feilden is well again he can ask you to sing for himself. We heard that he had been hurt," she continued, now addressing Elizabeth, "but I suppose, as you are able to leave him, that it was all a mistake."

"He is dying," was the answer. "He can only live for a few hours, perhaps not for so long, and he wants to hear that song." She had turned to Mabel again now. "I—I used to sing it to him long ago. You will not refuse, dear. I—I shall be very grateful if you will do this thing for me."

Elizabeth spoke simply and quietly, but there was something in her voice and manner that would admit of no denial. Mabel Gale got up and followed her without a word, and Miss Norton watched their departure with blanched cheeks and wide, horrified

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eyes. For once she was shocked into silence, and all her vulgar self-assurance and vanity had deserted her completely.

When the threshold of the room where Jack was lying was reached, Betty paused, and laid her hand on the young girl's arm.

"I want you to promise me—" she said, in a low, hurried whisper, "I want you to promise that you will just sing the song and not say anything else, not a single word. He—he, Mr Feilden, asked me to sing to him, but I cannot—I cannot—you understand, for my voice is gone. I—I—oh, it can't make any difference to you, it can't hurt you to help me. I want him to think that I am singing, this once—before he dies."

Mabel listened, with bewildered, wondering eyes to this explanation, then she slipped her fingers softly into Elizabeth's hand. "Yes," she whispered, "I understand, I promise. I will do anything—anything you wish."

She lifted her head as she spoke, and the other woman stooped and kissed the trembling, child-like lips. Then she opened the door, and they went together into the quiet room.

Mabel paused on the threshold as if afraid to venture further, but Betty went forward to Jack's side. A large screen had been placed round his couch, for all the windows were set wide open. Rose was fanning the dying man with a palm leaf fan, but she moved away as her sister-in-law approached.

The latter knelt down, once more, at the side of the couch. Even in the short time that she had been absent she could see that a change had come over Jack's face. It looked grey now in the dim light,

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and haggard. The breath came in painful gasps through his parted lips.

"Are you ready for the song, dear?" Betty said softly, "the 'Skye Boat Song' that you want to hear? Rose will play the accompaniment. Won't you, Rose? You always used to play it for me in the old days."

Jack nodded, with a faint smile, and she got up and moved quietly across the room. There was a piano standing in one corner, and taking Mabel's hand, she drew her towards it. Rose followed without a word, and, seating herself before the instrument, began to play a soft prelude.

Poor Mabel Gale was very nervous at first as she began to sing. She cast frightened glances in the direction of the screen and of the prostrate figure which was half concealed behind it. The stillness of the room seemed to paralyse her, and her voice trembled pitifully; but, after a while, her courage returned to her in a measure, and the beautiful soprano notes rang out clear and true and strong through the silence, the plaintive words of the song striking, with pathetic appropriateness, upon the ears of the listeners.

Jack lay motionless and silent, but every now and then a little satisfied smile flitted across his wan face.

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye.

Mull was astern, Rum on the port,
Eig on the starboard bow,
Glory of youth glowed in his soul,
Where is that glory now?

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Give me again all that was there,
Give me the sun that shone,
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,
Give me the lad that's gone.

Billow and breeze, islands and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone."

There was the sudden stir of a quick, hurried movement. Haynes had risen from his place and was stooping over the couch, and Elizabeth, who had been standing where she could see the face of the dying man, darted forward with a low cry.

Jack raised himself, for a moment, on his elbow, and then he sank back, once more, against the pillows. He never noticed that although Betty's arms were round him, and her soft voice was whispering in his ear, the clear notes of the song still rang through the room:

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye."

CHAPTER XX

It was late in the afternoon of the following day, and the sun was setting once more behind the Lybian hills, when Elizabeth came out of the garden gate that faces the Nile, and, turning to the left, walked slowly along the river bank. She was dressed in white, and her cheeks were almost as colourless as her gown. There were dark shadows under her eyes, and she looked very fragile and weary. She carried a letter in her hand, and as she strolled along, she glanced down at it thoughtfully from time to time.

Jack Feilden had been buried that morning, at sunrise, in the shady green cemetery on the Karnak road, and Betty had stood beside the grave, calm and motionless, with a cross of white flowers—the blossoms which should have been used to fashion her own bridal wreath—in her hand. She had not wept nor shown any outward signs of grief, and Rose had wondered not a little at her composure, but all Betty's tears for Jack had been shed ten years ago, and the dull sense of mingled pain and regret that she felt now, bore but small likeness to the passionate sorrow of those earlier days.

She was lonely again; that was her principal thought, just at first, and it was not until later on in the day, when Rose spoke of Kerr, and said how shocked and grieved he would be to hear of

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his friend's death, that memory began to reassert itself, and she came back, out of the vague dreary mists of the past, to the remembrance of the needs and realities of the present and the future.

"He will feel it, I know," Mrs Brown had said, "for he and poor old Jack have been so much together these last few weeks. If I were to send a letter to Khartoum now, he would get it before he starts, but I shall not do anything of the sort. It would do no good, would it, Betty? And it would be a brutal thing to do. I should hate to send a man bad news just when he was setting off on a long, terrible journey."

Elizabeth had made no reply, but, as she listened, a vague pain and anxiety had dawned in her sad eyes. After a minute or two she had left Rose, and going up to her own room, had seated herself in her usual position at the open window and had forced herself to face this new crisis with which she was so suddenly confronted.

It seemed to her that she was standing at the parting of two ways and that two voices called to her and two separate duties claimed her allegiance. On the one side there was Jack Feilden—Jack who had died only yesterday with her hand in his and with her name on his lips, and who must, surely, still have some rights over her life and her faith—and on the other side stood Kerr, the man who loved her, and whom she loved so dearly in return.

It was too soon, far too soon, to harbour any thoughts of the future. She reproached herself bitterly with a sudden, passionate sense of recoil at the thought of her own heartlessness. On this day, when she had stood beside Jack's open grave,

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was it not fitting and imperative that he should have sole possession of her thoughts?

There would be time enough, later on, to remember Kerr and her own happiness. There would be time enough, weeks hence, when the first shock and horror of the tragedy had been a little forgotten; and then, at this point, she stopped and caught her breath quickly as the thought which Rose's words had suggested swept back into her mind. She was wrong, there would be no time, no chance after to-day. Kerr was going away, he was on the eve of starting out on a dangerous expedition. If she delayed the opportunity of recalling him might be lost to her for ever.

"I shall be at Khartoum for a few days. If you write to me there by this day week, the letter would catch me, but, after that, it will be too late."

"After that it will be too late." Those had been his very words, she remembered them distinctly, and now it was the last day of the week and she must make up her mind without loss of time.

Should she write and tell Kerr of Jack's death? Or should she allow him to go away, not knowing that she was free, away into the wilds from which he might, perhaps, never return?

It was a difficult choice to be called upon to make and one that was especially hard to a woman of Elizabeth's temperament and education, for she felt that it would be well-nigh impossible for her, on this first day, when her old lover was hardly yet cold in his grave, to write the letter that should summon his rival back to her side. It would be a cruel act, she told herself, and a heartless one, nay, more than that even, it would be nothing less than an outrage

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and an indecency, an insult to the man who had loved her so faithfully and a desecration of all the tender memories of the past.

All Betty's inherited instincts, all the conventional precepts of her upbringing, all the natural sensitiveness of her character, united together to forbid her to do this thing, and she could not repress an involuntary shiver at the mere idea of the horrified amazement and disapproval with which her conduct would be regarded.

Even Rose Brown, she felt sure, would be shocked and scandalised, while as for her relations at Beggar's Bush, there would be no limit to their disgust and indignation at such a flagrant breach of the proprieties.

And then her thoughts veered round again and she remembered Kerr and how they had faced death together a week ago. She remembered his face, the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand on hers. She remembered everything, and she knew then that her choice was already made, and that, for him and his love, she would willingly throw pride and sentiment and conventionality to the four winds.

It would be wicked and absurd to sacrifice her whole happiness—and his—for an idea, to ruin two lives for the sake of a morbid fancy.

She had not loved Jack. In reality, as far as she was concerned, his death had taken place ten years ago, and she had promised Kerr that there should be truth between them at least.

Elizabeth stretched out her hand to draw forward her writing-case, and, as she did so, her eyes filled with sudden tears. Poor Jack, it was hard indeed that this one day could not be kept sacred to his

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memory. The diamonds of her old engagement ring seemed to be blinking at her through a mist—a grey haze, out of which phantom hands beckoned, phantom voices whispered, and phantom faces peered with reproach in their wistful eyes. She brushed away the tears resolutely, and dipped her pen into the ink. There was no time now to think of the dead and the past, her thoughts must be given to the future, and if she delayed, it would be too late.

Elizabeth had found it no easy matter to write that letter, short and simple as it was—a mere statement, indeed, of the one fact of Jack Feilden's death. Every word had hurt her, and the whole task had gone directly against the grain of her sensitive and imaginative nature.

More than once she had been sorely tempted to tear up the written page and leave everything to fate and to chance, but the promise that she had made to Kerr on the day of their parting, seemed to force her hand. She had said that she would let him know if anything happened or she had need of him, and she could not break her word now. It was impossible to face the thought of the dangers to him and of the long period of suspense and uncertainty which would follow her silence.

When the letter was finished at last she read it through slowly, and then her heart misgave her again. What if he should not understand her meaning? What if he should fail to read the message that lay between the lines of the curt little epistle?

There was not a word of love in the letter, nor a hint of hope; supposing that he should not realise her need and her loneliness, and should, after all,

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start out on that journey, the very thought of which chilled her blood, and made her heart beat quickly with fear and apprehension of misfortune?

She glanced at the page a second time, but she felt that it would be impossible to add another sentence to those which she had already written, and then a thought came to her, and, for a moment, a wistful little smile played about her lips. She drew out from beneath her dress the long gold chain, and disengaged from it her amulet, the little blue "Key of Life."

That should be her message, and she did not doubt for a moment that its meaning would be clear to the man she loved. Kerr would know, he would remember Mrs Brown's definition, he would understand. She pressed the trinket to her lips for a moment, and then, wrapping it up securely, she laid it between the folds of her letter, and addressed the envelope with a hand that did not tremble any longer, and with an expression of quiet resolution on her pale face.

Betty's determination did not really waver again, but still it was late in the afternoon when, at last, she left her room with the sealed letter in her hand, and even then she did not post it at once, but turned to the west and wandered away from the hotel and along the bank of the river.

She passed the gaily-decorated shops of the Hindoos, and the native *cafes*, where dragomans and sallow-faced men and boys in scarlet tarbushes were sitting smoking and gossiping at the small, dirty tables. They glanced up at her inquisitively as she approached and whispered together, for her position as Feilden's *fiancée* and her share in the recent tragedy had made her an object of interest in Luxor to Arabs and Europeans alike. Betty was

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quite unconscious of the curiosity which she was arousing, and she walked on quietly until the road narrowed into a steep, dusty track and she was alone. At a sharp turn in this pathway there was a sakkieh, and beyond it a wooden bench facing the Nile and the setting sun.

Elizabeth seated herself on the bench and watched, with dreamy eyes, the purple hills, the golden glory of the sky and the vivid hues that were reflected in the smooth surface of the river.

Near at hand a blue-robed Arab had spread out his cloak and was kneeling upon it, with the low rays of the sun full on his dark, impassive face and rapidly-moving lips. He took no notice of the Englishwoman's appearance, but rose to his feet, knelt again, and bowed forward, till his forehead touched the ground, with automaton-like regularity. After a minute or two his devotions came to an end, and then, picking up his cloak, he flung it carelessly over one shoulder and went on his way.

There was nobody else in sight along the path; it was very silent and peaceful, and even the broad river seemed to be deserted.

Elizabeth's mood had changed again now, for the weariness of reaction had set in, and a dull languor and melancholy had taken possession of her mind. Her listless fingers played with the letter in her lap, and she glanced down at it doubtfully from time to time.

"After all," she asked herself sadly, "should she send it? Was it worth while? Would anything ever be worth while again?"

There had been so much sorrow in her life, so much loneliness and disappointment. It was difficult to

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realise that these would not, of necessity, be her portion until the end.

As the sun sank slowly down behind the hills it seemed to her—in her sadness and hopelessness—that its disappearance was a fitting symbol of her own life and her own failure.

“The night hath a thousand eyes, and the day but one,
Yet the light of the whole world dies with the dying sun.”

Yes, it was true—a little shiver ran through her at the thought—quite true. Her sun had set, once and for all, ten years ago, and with it her dreams of love and happiness had faded away for ever. It was too late now for her to expect that any change or joy could come into her life.

The sun dipped and vanished behind the western hills, a chilly breeze sprang up, and all the warmth and radiance faded, as if by magic, out of the sky and river. As the sudden pallor spread over the world Betty shivered again. It was too late, too late. She whispered the words to herself, and, bending forward, covered her face with her clasped hands. The day had come to an end, the light had gone, it was too late.

Everything in the wide landscape seemed to have grown cold and grey and cheerless, and the woman's slender, white-clad figure looked strangely wan and ghost-like as she sat there, motionless and alone, in the dim, uncertain light. The letter, which had been written with such pain and trouble, slipped to the ground, and lay, forgotten and unheeded, in the dust at her feet.

A bat skimmed past on swift, noiseless wings, and tiny stars began to glimmer faintly in the pale sky.

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On the other side of the river a blue haze of wood smoke drifted slowly across the belt of cultivated land. It was almost dark there already. The last rays of reflected sunlight faded away from the summits of the rocky hills above Der-el-Bahri, and the violet shadows in the curves and hollows of the further mountains lost their delicate rosy hues and became grey and pallid.

Some minutes passed away before Elizabeth moved. Then she lifted her head, and, surprised at the silence and gathering darkness, rose quickly to her feet. It was late, and she must be getting back to the hotel. Rose would be anxious if she delayed any longer, and her letter was still unposted. Her letter! She stooped to pick it up from the dusty pathway, and as she brushed away the grains of sand that adhered to the envelope, her eyes rested on Kerr's name, and, through the thick folds of paper, her hands could feel the little trinket which she had enclosed.

Her face changed suddenly, as if a ray of sunlight had touched it, and a wave of delicate colour flooded her pale cheeks, for hope and comfort were stealing back into her heart. Was not this letter going to the man she loved, and would it not carry with it her mascot, the amulet which he had given to her, and which should be, at the same time, her message of recall and the pledge of her love?

She lifted the envelope to her lips, there in the gathering twilight, and kissed it again and again.

And when she looked up, once more, all the chill and melancholy of evening had vanished completely, and a marvellous transformation seemed to have taken place in the world around her.

The east was radiant with more than its former

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brilliance of rosy light, and the smooth surface of the great river gleamed with crimson and orange and gold. The sun had set, it is true, behind the hills, but the wonder and glory of the after-glow was aflame in the sky.

THE END

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